



Australian Government
**Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research**

ACIAR

CORPORATE
PLAN
2023–24

Contents

Statement of preparation	2
Introduction	4
Our purpose	8
Performance framework	10
Key activities	10
Operating context	15
Capability	18
Our performance	24
List of requirements	28

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ACIAR Corporate Plan 2023–24

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Cover photograph: Celebrating the International Year of Millets (2023). ACIAR supports the International Year of Millets through contributing to the establishment of the new millets and ancient grains research initiative supported by the G20 Ag Chief Scientists Meeting in India in April 2023: **Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists (MACS) concludes (g20.org)**



About ACIAR

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is the Australian Government's specialist agricultural research-for-development agency.

ACIAR is established by the *Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Act 1982* (the ACIAR Act), as amended. It is a non-corporate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (the PGPA Act) and a statutory agency under the *Public Service Act 1999*.

ACIAR is an agency of the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio and contributes to Australia's development assistance program. ACIAR operates solely on budget appropriation from Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The executive management governance structure is headed by a Chief Executive Officer, who reports directly to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The [ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027](#) guides the agency, consistent with the ACIAR purpose under the enabling legislation and reflecting the Australian Government's foreign policy framework and the United Nations' Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.



Australian Government

**Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research**

I, Wendy J. Umberger as the accountable authority of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), present the ACIAR Corporate Plan 2023–24 for the period of 2023–24 to 2026–27, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

Wendy Umberger

Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR

28 August 2023

Foreword



Agricultural innovation is a strategic national capability that the Australian Government, through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), mobilises to build international research partnerships that improve food security, food system resilience and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the Indo-Pacific region.

In 2022, ACIAR celebrated the achievements and impacts of 40 years of agricultural research for development. Since establishment, ACIAR has worked with approximately 1800 different institutions in more than 1700 research activities. During this time, we have systematically undertaken independent impact assessment studies of our portfolio of research activities. Independent studies and evaluations of ACIAR projects and programs have consistently found high returns on investment, reflecting the quality of Australian agricultural science and our partnerships.

At the outset of 2022, ACIAR released a 2-part assessment of 40 years of research. The quantitative assessment demonstrated a total benefit of \$64 billion dollars, with a \$3.7 billion benefit to Australia. The qualitative assessment identified the key design, management and practice principles that support effective translation of research knowledge into development outcomes.

We have confidence that our well-established and continually evolving research partnership model is delivering against our vision and mission. The ACIAR business model of brokering research partnerships in agriculture, fisheries and forestry between the Australian innovation system and our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region is strongly aligned with the new Australian International Development Policy and remains as relevant today as it was when ACIAR was established in 1982.

I have long known and worked with ACIAR and have been a big supporter of the ACIAR approach to partnerships. As I take up the reins of ACIAR, I am excited about the prospects and opportunity before me and look forward to working with all those in the ACIAR family, in Australia, in our partner countries and throughout the world.

Wendy Umberger

Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR



Introduction

Australia is a world leader in agricultural innovation. This is a strategic national capability that the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is able to mobilise to build international research partnerships to improve food security, food system resilience and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, fishers and foresters in the Indo-Pacific region.

A compelling element of Australian statecraft in our region comes from tackling shared challenges with partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region through agricultural research collaboration. Australia is well equipped to play a leading role within our region and globally – disproportionate to the size of our population and our economy.

As an agency of the Australian Government, ACIAR works with regional partners to tackle the intersecting and complex challenges of growing more food, improving human nutrition and reducing poverty while using less land, water and energy. At the same time, while striving for more productive and sustainable agriculture, we must adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Our work reflects Australian Government policy imperatives articulated in the:

- » Australian Government's International Development Policy
- » Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- » Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Our mission is to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural research partnerships.

ACIAR brokers and supports collaborative international research partnerships based on respect, listening and learning from each other to improve livelihoods in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors in the Indo-Pacific region, while emphasising individual and institutional capacity building and opportunities for development led by the private sector. Diversity and flexibility are key to our work, but it is equally important that all programs, projects and partners are working towards common objectives and goals.

The **ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027** sets out 6 high-level strategic objectives that guide our partnerships, programs and projects. These objectives are consistent with the purpose stated in our enabling legislation and reflect the development policy imperatives of the Australian Government. Of these objectives, 3 build knowledge to underpin crucial development objectives and 3 ensure that our work is equitable, inclusive and empowering.

The ACIAR Corporate Plan 2023–24 outlines how we will deliver on our 6 objectives to achieve our purpose and mission. Over the 4 years covered by this corporate plan (2023–2027), we will continue to build the partnerships, knowledge and capacity required to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems in the Indo-Pacific region, in the context of a changing climate.

Responding to a changing world

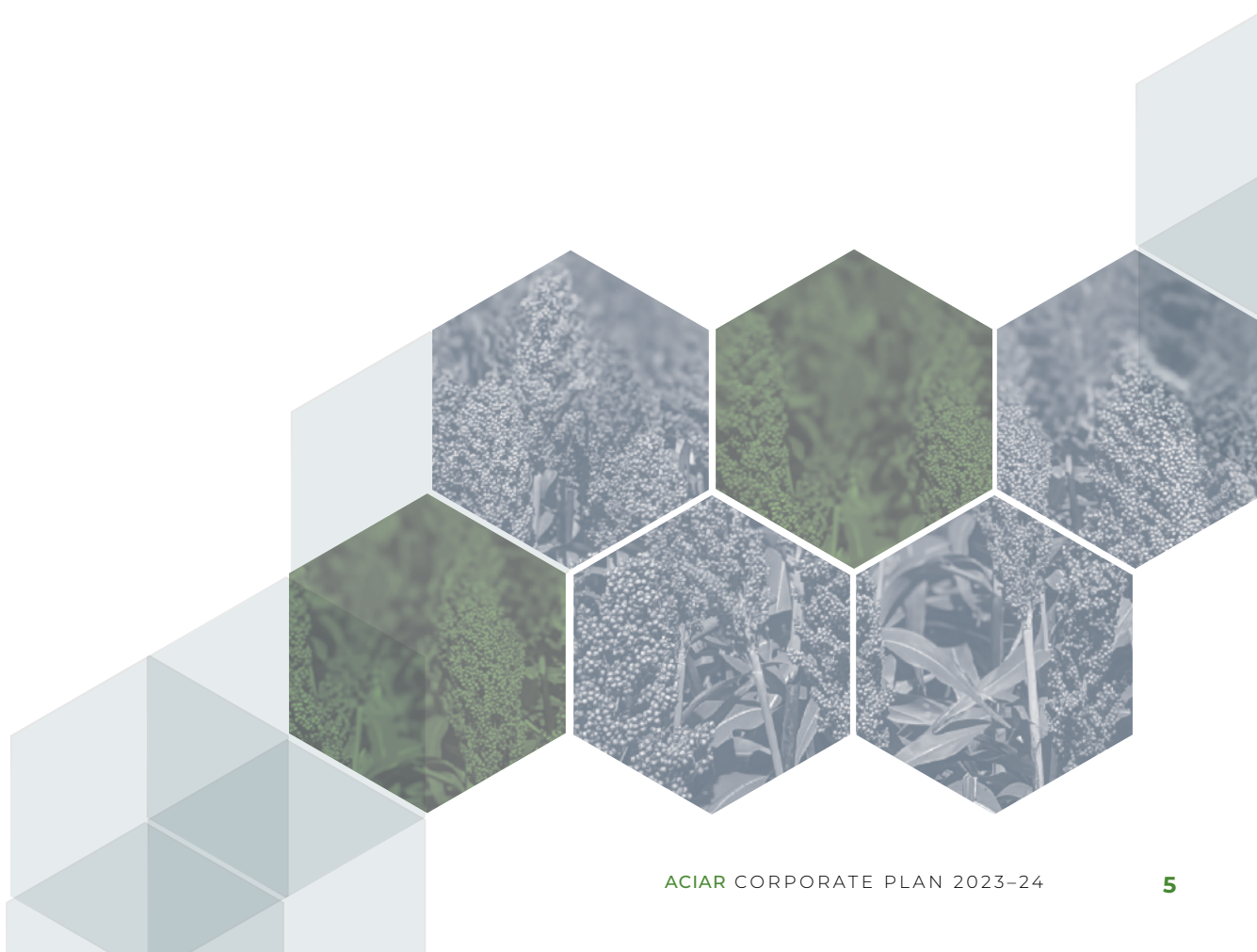
The Commission for International Agricultural Research initiated a mid-term review of the **ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027**, which was delivered by an independent panel, chaired by Dr Wendy Craik, in 2022.

Although the world has changed considerably in recent times influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, a mounting climate crisis and resurgent food security concerns, the panel found the strategy remains fit-for-purpose. It affirmed that ACIAR is held in high regard across the region and delivers value for money and effort, leveraging Australian strengths. It also noted impressive progress against important elements including monitoring, learning and evaluation; gender equity; capacity building; and outreach. However, the panel recommended some changes to its implementation to reflect our changing world.

A second edition of the strategy, endorsed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, was released to ACIAR partners during international meetings in Brisbane in November 2022. The revised edition maintains the same 6 high-level strategic objectives for ACIAR as the first edition and it identifies prospective new areas of research and ways to refine how we manage our research processes.

Last year, ACIAR started actioning many of the review recommendations through 6 strategic change initiatives. We took an immediate focus on transferring a proportion of our research investments from single issue or single discipline projects to transdisciplinary and cross-program initiatives. We also started working to maximise synergies between our multilateral and bilateral investments, by developing innovative partnerships with multilateral agricultural research-for-development institutions, such as but not limited to, the CGIAR.

The 6 strategic change initiatives developed in response to the review are the key focus for 2023–24, and throughout the following years.



The 6 strategic change initiatives

to be implemented by ACIAR in response to the mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027



Strategic change 1: Transformational research initiatives for food system resilience

By July 2025, ACIAR 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 2 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 5 years we will increase 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 5 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 5 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.

Planning for the next 4 years

Our focus on growing the knowledge base for farming and food systems, and in turn, improving livelihoods of smallholder farmers, fishers and foresters in our partner countries continues through our 3 key areas of operation:

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

Each of these areas of operation are responding to the implementation of the 6 strategic changes.

Opportunities ahead

ACIAR today has been shaped by many people working through many partnerships and projects since 1982. But none have had more influence than its Directors and Chief Executive Officers. Professor Andrew Campbell completed his term as ACIAR CEO on 31 July 2023, and Professor Wendy Umberger started her term on 14 August 2023.

Having been an ACIAR Project Leader and involved with many international agricultural organisations, Professor Umberger is well-versed in the ACIAR way. She will build on the great work of the organisation, as well as apply her own vision, ideas and experience to ACIAR. The original purpose and mandate for ACIAR are as relevant now as they were when ACIAR was established in 1982, regardless of the significant changes and events that have taken place in the world since that time.

ACIAR is committed to improving gender equity and social inclusion. We look forward to releasing a new strategy and action plan to 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.

We will continue to deliver our well-known and highly regarded fellowships, scholarships and capacity-building programs, while reviewing the program to further integrate with the research function of ACIAR, a key recommendation from the mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-year strategy.

We will continue to strengthen and broaden our relationship with our sister organisation in Canada, the International Development Research Centre, through co-investments to help address critical issues such as food loss and zoonotic diseases.

Our purpose

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

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

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

Our medium-term planning is guided by the **ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027**, which sets out 6 high-level strategic objectives to guide and inform our partnerships and research programs. These objectives are consistent with the Australian Government's official development assistance (ODA) policy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Further, our work reflects Australian Government policy imperatives articulated in the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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

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

Mission

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

Vision

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

The purpose of ACIAR in relation to our enabling legislation and strategic objectives

<p>ENABLING LEGISLATION</p> <p><i>Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Act 1982</i></p>	<p>AUSTRALIAN AID POLICY</p> <p>Australian Aid </p>	<p>2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS</p>
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PURPOSE

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

ACIAR 10-YEAR STRATEGY 2018-2027

<p>ACIAR brokers and invests in research partnerships in developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region to build knowledge to support crucial development objectives</p>	<p>ACIAR works to ensure that its research-for-development programs are equitable, inclusive and empowering</p>
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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

<p>1</p> <p>FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION</p>  <p>Improving food security and reducing poverty among smallholder farmers and rural communities</p>	<p>2</p> <p>NATURAL RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE</p>  <p>Managing natural resources and producing food more sustainably, adapting to climate variability and mitigating climate change</p>	<p>3</p> <p>HUMAN HEALTH AND NUTRITION</p>  <p>Enhancing human nutrition and reducing risks to human health</p>	<p>4</p> <p>GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT</p>  <p>Improving gender equity and empowerment of women and girls</p>	<p>5</p> <p>INCLUSIVE VALUE CHAINS</p>  <p>Fostering more inclusive agrifood and forestry value chains, engaging the private sector where possible</p>	<p>6</p> <p>CAPACITY BUILDING</p>  <p>Building scientific and policy capability within our partner countries</p>
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Performance framework

Prepared as part of the Enhanced Commonwealth Performance Framework, this corporate plan is the primary planning document for ACIAR for the period 2023–24 to 2026–27 and forms the basis for our annual performance statement.

The Australian Government seeks to achieve benefits for the Australian community (outcomes) primarily through programs delivered by government entities. Our work is framed by one Australian Government outcome and delivered through one Commonwealth program. This corporate plan sets out how ACIAR intends to achieve its purpose for the 4-year period of this plan.

Key activities

To achieve our purpose of contributing to the reduction of poverty and the improvement of livelihoods through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research, our work has 3 key activities.

Our key activities broadly remain similar to previous years' work; however, our programs and processes undergo continual review, improvement and development to accommodate the changing environment in which we work. ACIAR will continue to address the recommendations arising from a mid-term review of our 10-year strategy. We have the challenge of developing longer-term transformational and transdisciplinary research programs, while developing innovative partnerships and greater investments with CGIAR and other global organisations, to respond to major issues of concern in agriculture in low and lower-middle income countries.

For the period of this corporate plan, 2023–24 to 2026–27, ACIAR plans its functions and delivers work through 3 key activities:

1. Global research collaborations
2. Bilateral and regional research projects
3. Scientific and policy capacity-building activities.

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

Portfolio Budget Statements	Outcome 1	
	To achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural research and training partnerships.	
	Program 1	
	<p>International agricultural research for development for more productive and sustainable agriculture.</p> <p><i>ACIAR is an investor, broker, facilitator and manager of strategic partnerships in agricultural research for development, and an evaluator and communicator of research findings. The partnership model ensures that partner countries have input into and ownership of research priorities and the delivery of research programs. This approach maximises the relevance of the research undertaken and the likelihood that research outputs and findings will be used and will make a difference to those countries and to Australia. ACIAR has a well-established Impact Evaluation Program that helps us to refine our priorities, learn lessons from current and past projects, and report accurately to the Minister, the Parliament and the wider Australian public.</i></p>	
Corporate Plan	Purpose	
	To contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research.	
	Key activities	
	<p>To contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research, we deliver programs in line with the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027 through 3 key activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Global research collaborations 2. Bilateral and regional research projects 3. Scientific and policy capacity-building activities 	
	Performance measures	Expected Performance Outcomes
	<p>Through annual project progress reports, mid and end-project reviews, long-term outcome and impact evaluation, case studies (quantitative and qualitative), and financial activity indicators, as appropriate to each performance criteria, ACIAR will measure the extent to which these activities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » exceeding expectations » meeting expectations » not meeting expectations 	All 3 key activities meeting or exceeding expectations
Annual Performance Statement	Reports achievement of outcomes set for performance measures	

1. Global research collaborations

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

ACIAR manages Australia's investment in the international agricultural research system, as mandated by the ACIAR Act. The major investment is in CGIAR, the world's largest global agricultural innovation network that comprises 15 international agricultural research centres and more than 3,000 partners, with a presence in 89 countries and 50 years of experience.

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

Our investment in these multilateral collaborations gives Australia an influential role in the maintenance and dissemination of global and regional public goods. Through these investments we seek to maintain a strong voice in international agricultural research and contribute to maintaining a coordinated partnership approach to addressing challenges in global food systems.

2. Bilateral and regional research projects

Our core business is to identify research priorities collaboratively with partner countries and broker research partnerships to use science and technology to address those priorities. Our bilateral and regional research projects are managed by a set of ACIAR Research Programs structured around key agricultural sectors (crops, fisheries, forestry, horticulture and livestock), as well as the science to sustain the resource base (soil and land management, water, and climate change) and the science to generate economic and social benefit (agribusiness and social systems).

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

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

3. Scientific and policy capacity-building activities

ACIAR facilitates formal and informal activities and opportunities to develop the scientific and policy capability of individuals and organisations involved in agricultural research for development in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Capacity Building Program comprises a diverse suite of activities including supporting post-graduate studies, research, management and leadership skills development.

We will deliver our core activities within the program through face-to-face learning and online through 'ACIAR Learn'. We will also review our program to further integrate with the research function of ACIAR, a key recommendation from the mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-year strategy..

We will continue the John Allwright Fellowship for postgraduate training, and for the John Dillon Fellowship we will focus on country and regional based cohorts to strengthen organisational capability to effectively undertake and manage research. Following the success of our Meryl Williams Fellowship, we will bring our 2 initial cohorts together in 2023 for the first time to meet one another, network and strengthen their mentorship capability to be the new generation of mentors to support our incoming fellows.

The Pacific Agriculture Scholarships Support and Climate Resilience program provides higher degree research funding and academic support to postgraduate students in agriculture, fisheries and forestry at the University of the South Pacific and Fiji National University. Through this program we will continue to provide opportunities in the Pacific for emerging agricultural researchers to strengthen their research capability, while supporting their university experiences.

We continue to strengthen our alumni programs to support continuous learning and mentoring in agricultural research for development.



ACIAR regions and partner countries

Pacific

- 1 Fiji
- 2 Kiribati
- 3 Papua New Guinea
- 4 Samoa
- 5 Solomon Islands
- 6 Tonga
- 7 Vanuatu

East and South-East Asia

- 8 Cambodia
- 9 China
- 10 Indonesia
- 11 Laos
- 12 Myanmar
- 13 Philippines
- 14 Timor-Leste
- 15 Vietnam

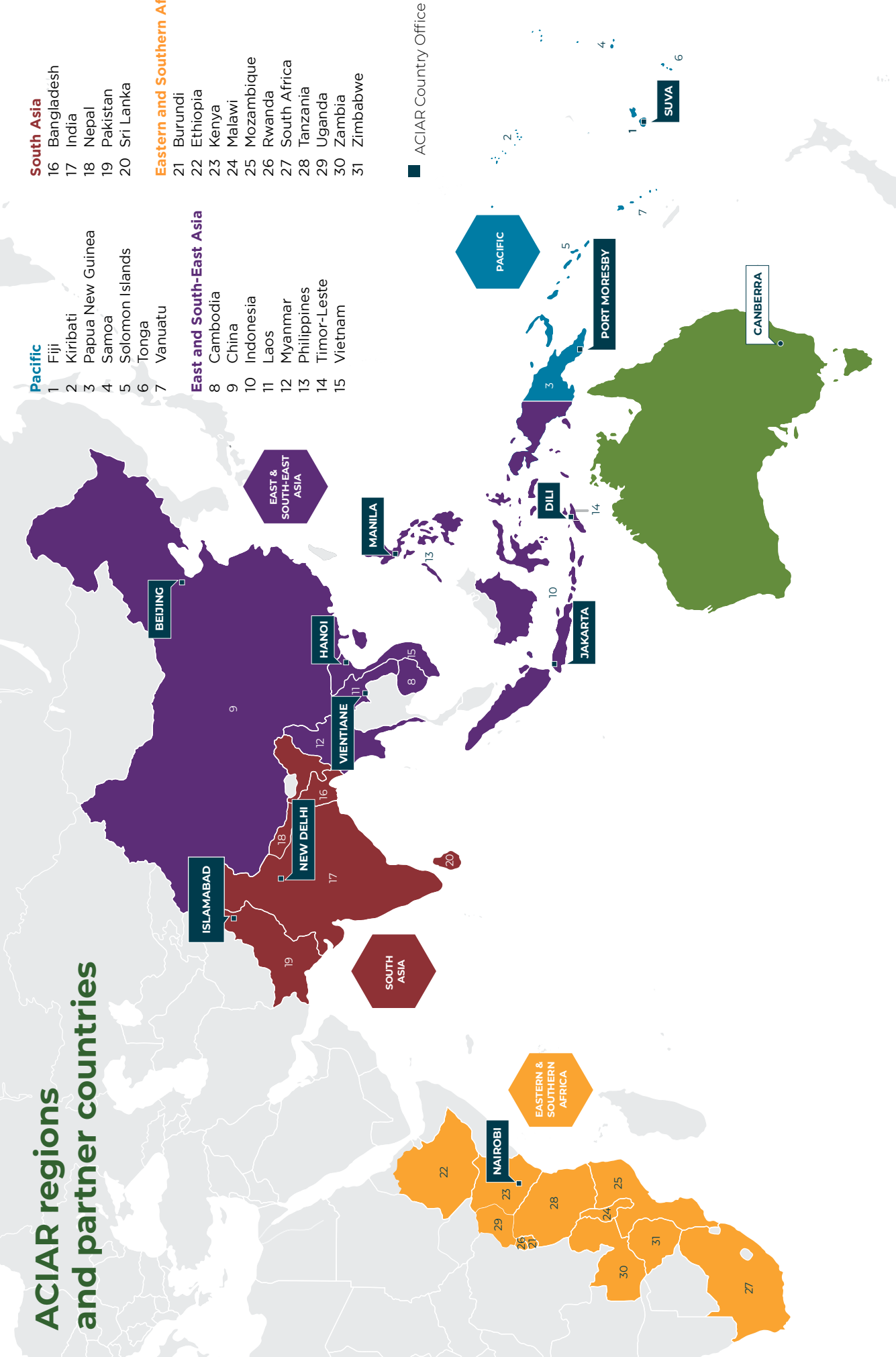
South Asia

- 16 Bangladesh
- 17 India
- 18 Nepal
- 19 Pakistan
- 20 Sri Lanka

Eastern and Southern Africa

- 21 Burundi
- 22 Ethiopia
- 23 Kenya
- 24 Malawi
- 25 Mozambique
- 26 Rwanda
- 27 South Africa
- 28 Tanzania
- 29 Uganda
- 30 Zambia
- 31 Zimbabwe

■ ACIAR Country Office





Operating context

Environment

Our operating environment has been reshaped by global-scale health and biosecurity crises, direct and indirect impacts of geopolitical tensions, and unprecedented weather events precipitated by a more variable climate. Our partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region continue to undergo rapid social, economic and political change. Overlaying this are substantial health and economic challenges that our partner countries continue to face because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global trends affecting our region include competing forces of globalisation versus trade protectionism and a shift in geopolitical power. Interwoven with social, economic and political change at global and regional levels, our partner countries grapple with the complex and intersecting challenges of growing more food and reducing poverty, while using less land, water and energy. Factors that have a direct influence on these challenges include major technological advances in food production, rising urbanisation, increasing globalisation of agrifood chains, climate change, increasing challenges to food safety and biosecurity, and a natural resource base under great stress.

Geopolitical tensions are having significant impacts on food supply chains and food security, particularly through reduced wheat and fertiliser exports: this in turn directly affects ACIAR partner countries. These challenges were intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and supply shocks across the global food system.

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

Our international relationships are managed by in-country staff at 13 locations in our working region. The highly regarded and respected ACIAR Country Network builds, maintains and facilitates key partnerships in country, as well as supports ACIAR staff and project teams to deliver research outcomes.

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

In 2023–24, ACIAR will operate in 31 countries, in 4 regions:

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

For the reporting periods covered by this corporate plan, 2023–24 to 2026–27, there are specific features and issues that will shape the operating environment within our regions, which are highlighted in the following sections of this plan.

Pacific

Australia's commitment to a more ambitious and intensified engagement with the Pacific region emphasises the importance of our ongoing and diverse program within the region. Key to that is our partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) to deliver strategic regional public goods. These include SPC stewarding the biennial Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry as the premier event drawing global attention to agriculture and forestry in the Pacific region. The Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry provides a forum to showcase recent research and development achievements, create opportunities for regional and international collaboration and bring together regional leaders around implications and opportunities for supporting policy.

Through the period of this corporate plan, ACIAR will implement new strategies for working with the Pacific region that address:

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

East and South-East Asia

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

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

South Asia

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

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

Eastern and Southern Africa

Agriculture typically accounts for 30–40% of the GDP of African countries and more than 70% of the continent's poor live in rural areas. While agriculture remains a key driver of the economic growth required to deliver economic transformation for the rural poor, growth in productivity and production have broadly stagnated in the past decade. Unlocking the potential of Africa's agricultural and food systems requires substantial investment in the agriculture sector and in research to provide the knowledge that underpins growth in agricultural productivity, especially for commercialising smallholder farming.

The ACIAR program with Africa contributes to agricultural research-for-development knowledge in the region – an area receiving less support from many of the major development organisations. Key features of the region during the period of this plan are as follows:

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

Capability

ACIAR has the capability to achieve our goals and deliver on our purpose through our people, structures, processes, learning and technology. ACIAR relies on our corporate strategies to enable our workforce to continue to build on our existing foundations and undertake our corporate functions delivering on our 10-year strategy.

The underlying corporate strategies are reviewed annually by each section of ACIAR to ensure we are working together to a common goal and continuing to have the right people in the positions required to achieve our goal.

The investment and design of projects, programs and partnerships that make up the ACIAR research portfolio are guided by our high-level strategic objectives and tested against our performance criteria and targets (ACIAR Portfolio Budget Statement 2023–24). Activities are conceived, planned and implemented because of consultation and input from 4 operational areas, which are:

- A.** Multilateral and Government Partnerships
- B.** Country Partnerships
- C.** Research Programs
- D.** Capacity Building Program

These operational areas of ACIAR are supported by:

- E.** Outreach
- F.** Corporate Services

A. Multilateral and Government Partnerships

Our Multilateral and Government Partnerships program builds and manages partnerships with a range of international organisations, institutes and associations engaged in agricultural research and in the delivery of global and regional public goods.

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

B. Country Partnerships

Our Country Partnerships area manages the strategic relationships we have with overseas partner countries and research agencies. This is done largely through 11 country offices in 13 locations across the Indo-Pacific region. These offices (all led by locally engaged staff) support the development and regular recalibration of our bilateral regional relationships. Our in-country office teams play an increasingly important role in enabling research on the ground, providing logistical support to Australian researchers in country, and keeping abreast of emerging local issues that have implications for Australian aid policy and ACIAR research investments at country and regional scales.

The strength of our partnership model is maintained through regular strategy discussions with country partners, consultation with Australian, regional and international development agencies, and continued support of the strategic capabilities of our network of country offices. ACIAR maintains active communication with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and its Heads of Mission, Ambassadors and High Commissioners in partner countries, to ensure alignment with and relevance to Australia's broader development initiatives and objectives.

C. Research Programs

Our 6 strategic objectives guide the ACIAR Research Programs to ensure we achieve our mission of more productive and sustainable agricultural systems. To design and implement a successful research program, our experienced Research Program Managers work with partners to ensure the best possible research is designed to address priority issues. Due to their experience, our Research Program Managers have extensive networks within the industry and bring together the most effective teams to carry out the research. Annually, we work with some 400 organisations and close to 180 projects, to address challenges and opportunities.

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

D. Capacity Building Program

Our Capacity Building Program works with individuals and organisations in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance scientific research and policy capability. The program develops and facilitates post-graduate and mid-career capacity-building activities, which support increased skills, knowledge and understanding to undertake effective, impactful, and sustainable agricultural research, and implement the findings, to contribute to our high-level strategic objectives. While most of the capacity-building activities are well-established, feedback and review are essential to ensure our work meets the changing needs and circumstances of our partners. During 2023–24, we will continue to deliver our core capacity-building activities, being flexible and adaptive to continuously improve as informed by our monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. Whilst we are seeing a return to face-to-face learning, we will continue to build on our lessons learned to strengthen our online platform capability, offering accessible opportunities to develop professionally and collaborate across the ACIAR project and alumni network. We will also continue to review our program to further integrate with the research function of ACIAR, a recommendation from the mid-term review of the [ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027](#).

E. Outreach

Outreach communicates to audiences in Australia and our partner countries the value and impact of ACIAR work, including research results and outcomes achieved, through increased awareness and understanding and access to knowledge and information. This contributes to food security, reduced poverty, climate change mitigation, and improved health and nutrition.

Outreach deploys a range of strategic public communication and engagement activities, which extend results of research to targeted groups of decision-makers, stakeholders and potential donors in partner countries, and to the research community and other relevant stakeholders. Through our website and enhanced social media channels, ACIAR communicates more broadly using video and photography, as well as through improved reports, information sheets and publications. ACIAR also connects with key stakeholders through face-to-face and online events.

In support of communicating results, the ACIAR Scientific Publications Committee provides a forum for cross-discipline collaboration to guide and support the selection, review and prioritising of proposals for publishing books in the ACIAR publications series. The committee also considers proposals for co-publishing scientific titles and direct funding of externally published titles.

F. Corporate Services

Corporate Services provides the underpinning business systems and frameworks for: Human Resources; Finance, Procurement and Legal; Business Systems; and Overseas Corporate Management.

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

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

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

Organisational structure

2023-24







Risk management

Risk oversight and management is essential for ACIAR functions and operations, underpinning the achievement of its purpose. The ACIAR Risk Management Policy and Framework provides an integrated structure enabling staff to proactively identify, manage and share risks in line with our risk appetite, tolerance, governance and accountability arrangements. Our positive risk culture, where staff at every level appropriately manage risk as an intrinsic part of their day-to-day work, requires an understanding of the appropriate risk acceptance.

While the CEO and Executive have overarching responsibility for managing risk, the CEO reports any issues related to risks that affect the delivery of the ACIAR objectives to the ACIAR Audit and Risk Committee. The Commission for International Agricultural Research also provides independent assurance to the CEO on risk oversight and management.

ACIAR, through our risk management plan, supports all staff to document and use risk information in their activities. Our approach was updated in 2022–23 to reflect changes in the Commonwealth Risk Management Policy. The ACIAR risk register details both strategic and program risks. ACIAR continues to conduct regular reviews and risk assessments to test and adjust our response to our operational environment.

ACIAR identifies both strategic risks (which may impact ACIAR strategic objectives or require a change in strategic direction) and program risks (that may impact our ability to deliver operational objectives). The ACIAR strategic risks and mitigation plans are in line with our risk appetite and tolerance, as outlined below.

Strategic Risks	Mitigation Plans
 <p>A significant cyber security incident results in the loss and/or exposure of sensitive information or the loss of business-critical systems.</p>	<p>Work with cloud service providers to increase cyber security controls for cloud services.</p> <p>Continue to monitor and upgrade controls through a sustained cyber security focus in the internal audit program.</p>
 <p>The safety of our people is compromised due to threats posed in our operational environments.</p>	<p>Continue to review processes to ensure that decision-making in this area is adequate to provide the highest level of safety for ACIAR staff.</p>
 <p>Ineffective management of our relationships, including those with the Minister's Office, the Secretary and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and research partners.</p>	<p>Maintain a clear communication channel with the Minister and the Office of the Minister, and the Secretary of DFAT.</p> <p>Dedicate resources to engage in the policy setting and in Australian research and agricultural policy spheres.</p> <p>Strengthen relationships with policy-setting individuals and institutions in both Australia and our developing-country partners to ensure information flow and influence.</p>
 <p>Disruption to our research programs because of significant political instability, pandemic and/or major global catastrophe.</p>	<p>Establish formal and regular communications with partners.</p> <p>Develop advanced skills and tools for the Country Network to be able to steward re-engagement with partners when the impact/crisis subsides.</p>

Partnerships and engagement

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

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



Our performance

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

Throughout the period of this corporate plan, ACIAR will manage projects and establish relationships and programs that contribute to the achievement of our targets in our 3 key areas of work.

1. Global research collaborations
2. Bilateral and regional research projects
3. Scientific and policy capacity-building activities

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

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

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

1. Global research collaborations

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

Work in this area is achieved mainly through:

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

Our performance is measured by our influence as a funder, through ACIAR representation on governance bodies of our multilateral partners, and the mutual respect and commitment demonstrated in our multilateral partnerships.

Key performance measures for global research collaborations, 2023–24 to 2026–27

Area monitored	Performance indicator	Annual outcome
Influence as a donor	% of supported multilateral research collaborations in which ACIAR is represented on a governance body	Rated as exceeding expectations: ACIAR was influential in supporting effective multi-lateral research governance through all supported research collaborations
Mutual respect and commitment	% of multilateral financial contributions delivered by the end of the financial year	Rated as meeting expectations: Partnership management processes ensured timely financial acquittal of public funds
	% of agreed reporting products submitted within agreed time frames	Rated as meeting expectations: Partnership management processes ensured timely receipt of agreed deliverables
	% of multilateral financial contributions delivered within an acceptable range of variation from previous financial year	Rated as meeting expectations: ACIAR provided consistent support for global public goods, research, infrastructure and capacity

2. Bilateral and regional research projects

Agricultural research facilitated and implemented by ACIAR, and partner countries has benefits at the farm, regional and national levels, and benefits for smallholders, communities, and industries. In any one year, there will be close to 180 ACIAR-supported bilateral and regional research projects underway in the Indo-Pacific region. The research is led by commissioned organisations (universities, CSIRO, state government agencies or private firms) and/or international agricultural research centres and is a collaboration between project leaders and in-country organisations.

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

Key performance measures for bilateral and regional research projects, 2023–24 to 2026–27

Area monitored	Performance indicator	Annual outcome
Project management	% of annual deliverables submitted on schedule	Rated as meeting expectations: Project management practices ensured timely financial acquittal of public funds
	% of annual and final reports submitted on schedule	Rated as meeting expectations: Project management practices ensured timely delivery of commissioned work
Delivery of intended project objectives	% of projects concluded during the financial year that rated as good quality or above on the effectiveness criteria in final project reviews	Rated as meeting expectations: The research portfolio effectively delivered agreed end of project outcomes
	% of projects concluded during the financial year that rated as good quality or above on the gender equity criteria in final project reviews	Rated as meeting expectations: The research portfolio effectively responded to the different needs of women and girls
Contribution to development outcomes	% of outcome evaluations completed during the financial year showing evidence of contribution to intended development outcomes	Rated as meeting expectations: Evidence shows that the research contributed to development outcomes
	% of long-term economic impact assessments completed during the financial year showing benefit–cost ratio of 3:1 or above	Rated as meeting expectations: Evidence shows that the funded research improved productivity

3. Scientific and policy capacity-building activities

Our work in the capacity building program supports the development and strengthening the skills, knowledge and understanding of individuals and organisations to undertake agricultural research to advance ACIAR objectives and development outcomes. To do this, we work with implementation partners to deliver formal and informal capacity building activities and project-based opportunities for individuals and organisations.

Our performance is measured at the sub-program level through targets for program management and delivery of intended program outputs. We also measure the contribution of our programs to development outcomes, several years after their conclusion.

Key performance measures for scientific and policy capacity-building activities, 2023–24 to 2026–27

Area monitored	Performance measure	Annual outcome
Project management	Annual program of work and budget is approved and acquitted	Rated as meeting expectations Project financial management practices ensured quality, timely delivery of program activities
	% of total participants identifying as women	Rated as meeting expectations Selection processes ensured balanced participation of all genders
Delivery of intended project objectives	% of total program participants successfully completing	Rated as meeting expectations Research and management qualifications of participants enhanced as expected
	% of participants who self-assess the program as high quality at completion	Rated as meeting expectations Program participant experience improves Australia's people-to-people linkages
Contribution to development outcomes	% of total program alumni surveyed annually who are engaged in relevant sectors	Rated as meeting expectations Research and management qualifications developed by the program retained within partner system as expected
	% of total program alumni surveyed annually who self-assess the program as a significant contribution to career development	Rated as meeting expectations Program contribution to participant career development assessed as significant

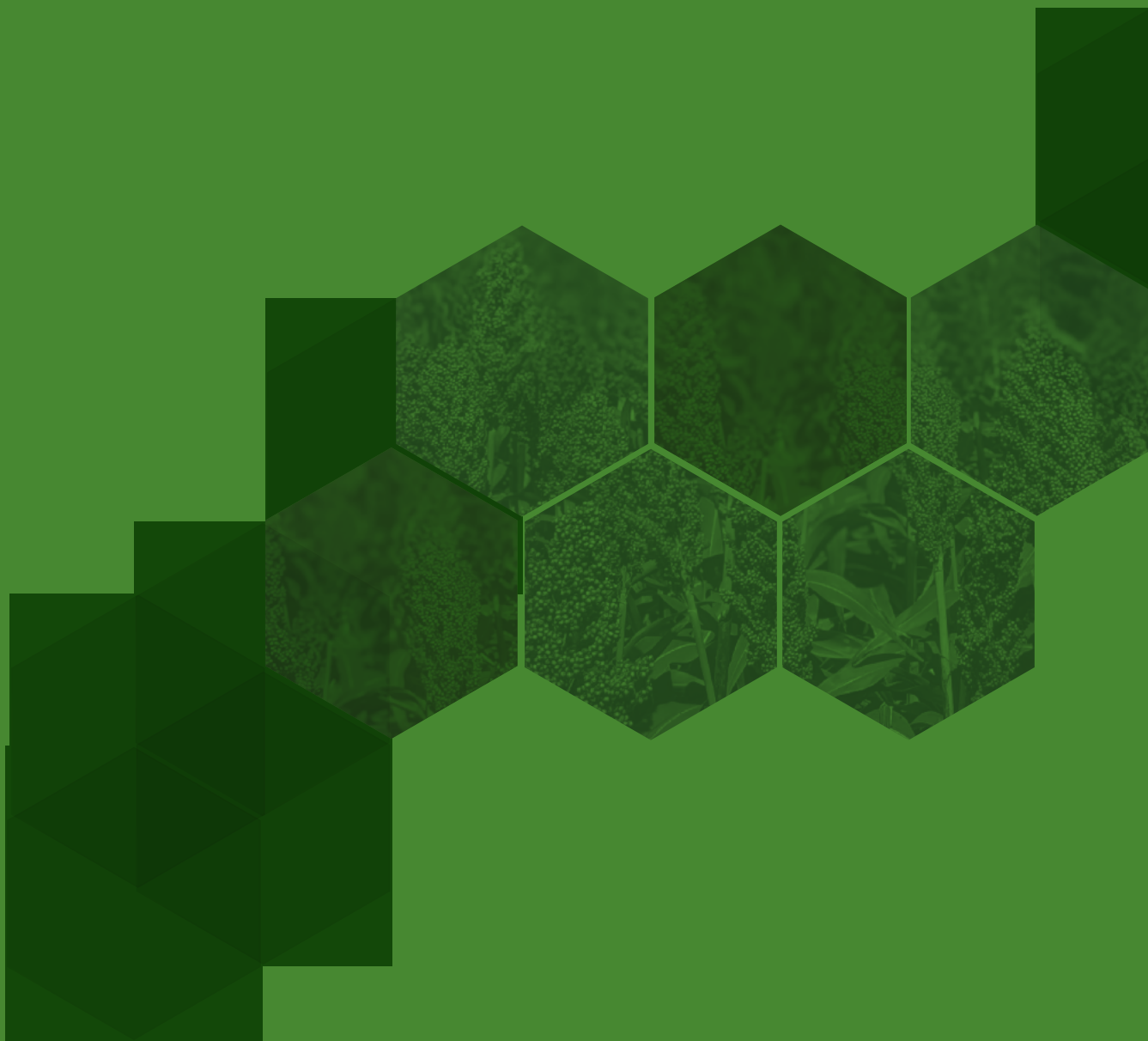
List of requirements

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

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

The following table details the requirements met by the ACIAR Corporate Plan 2023–24 and the page references for each requirement.

Requirement	Page(s)
Introduction	4
» Statement of preparation	2
» Reporting period for which the plan is prepared	2
» Reporting periods covered by the plan	2
Purposes	8
Key activities	10
Operating context	15
» Environment	15
» Capability	18
» Risk management	22
» Partnerships and engagement	23
Performance	24





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