

Funding	\$m
2009–10 actual	0.60
2010–11 budget allocation	0.60
2011–12 budget estimate	0.60

Position

ACIAR will continue to commission assessments of the impact of the research it funds. The primary purpose of these assessments is to provide stakeholders with information on the difference that ACIAR's investment in R&D has made at scientific, institutional and community levels in our partner countries and Australia. In addition, valuable lessons are drawn from the assessments and used in the selection, design and delivery of R&D projects. ACIAR has not only applied the extensive body of existing literature to this area of investment analysis, but has also contributed to the literature through this process.

The Impact Assessment program currently commissions two types of finished project assessments. The first are primarily economic evaluations, which are published in ACIAR's Impact Assessment Series (IAS). Most of the assessments are undertaken by independent economists with special expertise in measuring the returns to agricultural research. These involve an in-depth analysis of the adoption and impact of project outputs in the partner countries and Australia. A qualitative assessment of social and environmental impacts is also sought. In recent years the focus has been on thematic evaluations of larger numbers of projects in similar areas, overviews of all past impact evaluation studies, and an assessment of returns to total ACIAR funding.

Recognising the complex contextual environment in which ACIAR operates, the second type of finished project assessments are adoption studies. Adoption studies are primarily undertaken by the Australian project leader 3–4 years after completion of the project. They provide ACIAR and our collaborators with a greater understanding of the pathways to change and the level of adoption that has occurred. If there has been no adoption, the reasons why are sought. An improved understanding of the contextual environment in which we operate increases the likelihood that our research will have a positive impact.

As part of the evaluations, areas for practical methodology innovation have been identified. During 2011–12, a study focusing on methodological issues surrounding the assessment of natural resource management research will be commissioned.

ACIAR's impact assessment program has also formed active links with the Australian Government's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE). This link was largely established through the ODE's Rural Development Strategic Review and will be further strengthened during 2011–12.

2011–12 PRIORITIES

Project-specific

- Publish five economic assessments of the impacts of completed projects
- Publish the 2010–11 Project Leader Adoption Studies for projects concluded in 2006–07
- Complete pathway analysis of ACIAR's investment in oil palm research in PNG

Capacity building

- Deliver an in-country training workshop on orientating, designing and implementing projects to make a difference
- Deliver an impact assessment training workshop in collaboration with IRRI
- Enhance the specification and estimation of the impact of new projects by assisting project research groups during peer review of their proposals

Thematic studies

- Measuring the returns to natural resource management research: challenges and the way forward
- Assessment of the benefits to Australia from ACIAR's Fisheries program
- Analysis of ACIAR's returns to investment: an update
- The role of agriculture in poverty reduction: preliminary analysis of China, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Vietnam

Program management

Dr Debbie Templeton, Impact Assessment

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (2011–12)

- At least five impact assessment studies of completed projects published
- 2011–12 Project Leader Adoption Studies published
- Pathway analysis of ACIAR's investment in oil palm research in PNG published
- Methods used to assess natural resource management research reviewed
- Returns to ACIAR's investment in agricultural research updated and published
- Assessment of the benefits to Australia from ACIAR's Fisheries program completed
- One research evaluation and one impact assessment training workshop delivered
- Improved working links established with partner-country, international centre and Australian impact assessment groups