

International agricultural research — a quiet contributor to rebuilding lives and livelihoods

In the aftermath of the tragic Indian Ocean tsunami, agricultural scientists are working quickly and quietly in the background to plan and initiate activities aimed at restoring agriculture and food security in the devastated areas.

Led by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), its regional body the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission, the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific, and representatives of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), expert teams have made rapid assessments of the most urgent needs and longer term requirements. Humanitarian aid organisations and defence personnel have been at the forefront of restoring essential services and providing short-term food and shelter in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Now, national and international attention is turning to the long-term rebuilding effort.

Restoring agriculture and food security is an essential first step in helping the affected communities recover. Many of the coastal communities relied heavily on fishing for their livelihoods. They have lost their boats and nets,

and the fish populations they relied on have also been devastated.

In India, Indonesia and other affected countries, the tsunami washed many kilometres inland, destroying or damaging crops and leaving thick residues of salt-laden silt. Salinity levels in the land and sub-soil water have increased substantially. Farmers will need long-term help to adapt and adopt management practices and salt-tolerant crop varieties to restore productivity to their land.

ACIAR's role

As part of the Australian government's efforts, ACIAR is committing additional funds to its Indonesia program.

Our role in Australia's international development cooperation is as a facilitator and funder of agricultural research and extension. Therefore our resources and partnerships will be used to help re-establish food production and restore the livelihoods of farmers and fishers in affected areas, particularly Aceh. This assistance is commencing immediately, and will continue for several years.

Over the past few months, our staff have met with Indonesian agricultural, forestry and fisheries research institutes in Java and Sumatra to assess where Australian expertise is most needed.

Indonesia's tsunami-affected agriculture and fisheries R&D and exten-



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to rebuild
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sion staff in Aceh and other parts of northern Sumatra need help to re-focus their efforts on the immediate needs of local people. Training of these staff, using Australian and Indonesian expertise and intact facilities in other parts of Indonesia, was identified as a priority to bolster local contributions to the long-term relief effort. The training workshops will focus on fisheries management and issues associated with soil salinity and crop production in lands inundated by sea water.

The next stage will be the commissioning of collaborative research aimed at providing technical information to underpin longer term reconstruction of agriculture and fisheries in these areas.

Research needs in the following areas are being assessed:

- the degree of salinisation and siltation of farmland and demonstration of strategies to allow re-use of this land for farming

- the likely impacts on fish stocks because of tsunami damage to reef systems and coastal habitats
- re-establishment of coastal shrimp aquaculture and mariculture
- possibly in re-establishment of appropriate crop planting stock, cropping systems, small ruminant production and perhaps chicken production

During the rebuilding of agricultural industries and infrastructure, we will continue to work closely with AusAID, our Indonesian counterparts, FAO, the CGIAR and other regional bodies on the long-term reconstruction efforts.

As the Indian Ocean region starts to rebuild its coastal life, scientists from Australian and international agricultural research institutes have committed to join with their counterparts in the affected countries to bring their collective expertise to the massive rebuilding task.

For more information: www.aciar.gov.au/web.nsf/doc/ACIA-69L3Z3

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EXTENDING SYMPATHY AND A HELPING HAND TO OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

All ACIAR staff were saddened and shocked by the extent of the Indian Ocean tsunami and feel privileged to be able to play a very small role in the task of rebuilding lives and livelihoods. ACIAR expresses its deepest sympathy to research and development institutions in affected countries that have lost staff in the tragedy.