

Partnership key to progress

Dr Achmad Suryana, director general of the Indonesian Agency for Agriculture Research and Development

BY ROBIN TAYLOR

Growing up in a small village in west Java in the 1960s, Achmad Suryana decided to pursue a career in agriculture because he recognised its importance to the country's economy.

Now, Dr Suryana is director general of the Indonesian Agency for Agriculture Research and Development (IAARD) and a member of ACIAR's Policy Advisory Council. He heads an organisation of 8,000 staff including 1,800 researchers, who carry out research into food crops, horticultural crops, estate crops (such as palm oil and coconut) and livestock.

After completing Bachelor and Masters degrees in agricultural economics at Bogor Agricultural University, he went to the US for four years to complete a PhD in economics at North Carolina State University.

"I chose agriculture as a profession because at that time it was the backbone of the Indonesian economy," Dr Suryana says. "Even today, although only 16% of the GDP of Indonesia comes from agriculture, 40% of Indonesian workers are employed in agriculture and 70% of people in Indonesia live in rural areas, most of them below the poverty line."

He strongly believes that agriculture has an important part to play in improving the economy and the livelihoods of the poor.

ACIAR and IAARD have a long history of collaboration and Dr Suryana has been involved with ACIAR projects since the early 1980s. He cites some examples of these successful collaborations, such as the series of projects to improve the quality of Bali cattle and ACIAR's response to the December 2004 tsunami, which included a project to rehabilitate degraded aquaculture ponds in Aceh.

"I very much appreciate the partnership model of ACIAR projects because we can share our views, and our researchers can learn from working together with Australian scientists under the ACIAR framework," Dr Suryana says.

One of the main benefits he has seen

delivered through collaborative projects between Indonesian and Australian researchers, supported by ACIAR, is an increase in research capacity, for institutions and for individual researchers, as a result of working with international colleagues.

On top of this, Dr Suryana says that "in many areas of research—in the livestock, food crops and economics sectors, for example—findings and recommendations from ACIAR projects have been extended and applied in the field."

Before taking over the leadership of IAARD in 2004, Dr Suryana held senior positions in the Ministry of Agriculture, most recently director general of food security.

As the research arm of the Ministry of Agriculture, IAARD is responsible for providing technology and information to help the other divisions (directorate

generals) support improvements to livestock and crop production. Asked to describe the challenges and obstacles in achieving such goals, Dr Suryana says that limited infrastructure is a major obstacle.

He recently visited Australia for a meeting of the ACIAR Policy Advisory Council and toured CSIRO's Black Mountain laboratories in Canberra: "Compared to their facilities my agency has very limited capacity to come up with modern technology," he says.

"Another challenge is developing our human capital. There is a lack of opportunity for training, and researchers cannot keep up with new information."

But Dr Suryana believes collaborative work with organisations such as ACIAR is an important way to increase capacity. "I work very hard to give my best for the institute and I ask my staff to do the same. We have to be professional." ■



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