

Research program impact assessment

Program management

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Program*

Funding	
2007–08 actual	\$0.50m
2008–09 estimate	\$0.50m
2009–10 budget	\$0.54m

Key performance indicators

- at least five impact assessment studies of completed projects published
- impact assessment review of at least one thematic area in Indonesia
- impact assessment of at least one thematic area in Papua New Guinea (PNG)
- assessment of the impact of International Agricultural Research Centre (IARC) activities in ACIAR's mandate region
- 2009–10 Project Leader Adoption Studies published for selected projects completed in 2005–06
- links established with partner-country, IARC and Australian impact assessment groups.

Position

ACIAR has a long history of assessing the impact of its research and development (R&D) investments. These assessments have provided valuable lessons in improving the selection, design and delivery of R&D projects. They have also been useful for demonstrating the value of ACIAR as part of Australia's international development assistance program. The two main types of finished project assessments are adoption studies and impact assessments.

Adoption studies became part of ACIAR's evaluation strategy in 2003–04. They are undertaken by project leaders on completed projects where ACIAR expenditure was greater than \$400,000, and for which there is no follow-on project. The primary purpose of these evaluations is to provide information on the uptake of the project results, three years after a project's completion. In addition, where there has been no adoption, information on the reasons for the lack of uptake is sought. Information from adoption studies, of which over 50 have been completed to date, is used to support ACIAR's investment decision-making process, in project development and design, and in the selection of projects for impact assessment.

Impact assessments involve extensive analysis of the adoption and impact of the project results, both in the partner country or countries and in Australia. Over the last six years, there has been an increased focus on undertaking thematic impact

assessments, rather than assessing the impact of individual projects. The credibility of ACIAR impact assessments has been enhanced by several meta-evaluations and the use of independent consultants to undertake the studies. In addition, stratified random sampling techniques are used, where practical, to select projects for impact assessments. ACIAR has also published guidelines for assessing the impacts of its research activities to ensure rigour and consistency in all future assessments.

As part of the evaluations, areas for practical methodology innovations were identified and some advances in impact assessment methods were made. In recent years the focus has been on developing and implementing frameworks to measure the returns to ACIAR's investment in capacity building. Over 50 full benefit–cost assessments have been published in ACIAR's impact assessment series.

ACIAR has developed a database for systematically recording all the adoption studies and impact assessments and providing important summary information to support decision-making. This continues to be developed, expanded and refined to ensure maximum use is made of the results of these impact assessment efforts.

ACIAR has commenced the process of linking its impact assessment work to the activities of the Australian Government's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) and will strengthen this link during 2009–10.

Key priorities

Project-specific

- Publish five assessments in 2009–10 of the impacts of completed projects (this year, with an emphasis on increasing the number of impact assessments undertaken in ACIAR's two largest partner countries, Indonesia and PNG)
- Where possible and appropriate, increase emphasis on the type and quantity of data used in the impact assessments, in an effort to further strengthen their rigour and credibility
- Review and publish the 2009–10 project leader adoption studies for the set of large projects concluded in 2005–06.

Capacity building

- Develop collaboration with CGIAR centres in impact assessment activities, particularly of projects jointly funded through ACIAR
- Provide feedback on the implications of impact assessment studies for research project development and management within ACIAR, through 'lessons learnt' style meetings with all staff
- Enhance clarification and estimation of the outcomes of new projects, by assisting project research groups during peer review of their proposals and by including impact analysis in the project design; in particular, provide summaries of the implications of impact studies to meetings of these groups.

Thematic studies

- Review the application and impact of ACIAR natural resource management research activities in the Philippines
- Undertake an assessment of ACIAR's animal health and/or forestry research in Indonesia
- Commission a comprehensive review of all ACIAR impact assessment studies. This will expand its focus to include issues such as the public good basis for funding this type of collaborative research. It will also disaggregate the benefits to more accurately identify those attributed to other funders of the research and, especially, the development; and will look particularly for whole-of-government and between-government interactions, for example the shares of benefits to other aid donors such as AusAID
- Commission two studies to assess the impact of IARC activities in ACIAR's mandate region—the first review of past CGIAR impact assessment studies and development of an overview of the impact on the Asia-Pacific region and individual countries within this region; and the second, an assessment of the impact of at least one centre's genetic improvement program in ACIAR's mandate countries
- Work closely with the ODE to ensure ACIAR's impact assessment work maintains close links with the ODE's activities.