

Research program impact assessment

Funding

	\$m
2008–09 actual	0.53
2009–10 budget allocation	0.54
2010–11 budget estimate	0.60

Position

ACIAR will continue to be a major funder and user of the two main types of finished project assessments (adoption studies and ex-post impact assessments) that it commissions. The primary purpose of these assessments is to provide information on the difference the project made at scientific, institutional and community levels in the relevant developing country(ies) and Australia. In addition, valuable lessons are drawn from the assessments and used in the selection, design and delivery of R&D projects.

The rolling program of 'adoption studies' became part of ACIAR's evaluation strategy in 2003–04. Adoption studies are undertaken on completed projects where ACIAR expenditure was greater than A\$400,000, and for which there is no follow-on project. The studies are undertaken by the Australian project leader (or other nominated person) 3 years after the completion of the project. The primary purpose of these evaluations is to provide information on the uptake of the project results; where there has been no adoption, information on the reasons for the lack of uptake is sought.

The second evaluation of finished project is an impact assessment study, which is undertaken by external analysts and involves extensive assessment of the adoption and impact of the project results in the partner country or countries and Australia. Impact assessments provide estimates of the returns to the research investment on a project, suite of projects or research program (thematic studies). Over the past 7 years there has been an increased focus on undertaking thematic impact assessments rather than assessing the impact of individual projects. These returns are based on estimates of the economic impacts, while social and environmental, as well as important scientific and capacity building, impacts are generally assessed qualitatively.

As part of the evaluations, areas for practical methodology innovation have been identified. During 2010–11 a study focusing on methodological issues surrounding the assessment of policy-orientated 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 2010–11.

Key priorities

Project-specific

- » Publish five assessments of the impacts of completed projects in 2010–11, with the emphasis continuing to be on increasing the number of impact assessments undertaken in ACIAR's two largest partner countries, Indonesia and PNG
- » Further increase credibility of the assessments and, where possible and appropriate, strengthen the rigour of the type and quality of data used
- » Review and publish the 2010–11 Project Leader Adoption Studies for the set of large projects concluded in 2005–06

Capacity building

- » Develop collaboration with IARCs in impact assessment activities, particularly of projects jointly funded through ACIAR
- » Provide feedback on the implications of lessons learnt and analysis completed in 2009–10 for research project development and management within ACIAR
- » Enhance the specification 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

Thematic studies

- » Undertake a pathway analysis of ACIAR's investment in animal health
- » Undertake an impact assessment of ACIAR's forestry research in PNG, highlighting lessons for future investment
- » Complete the assessment of the benefits of IRRI's genetic improvement program in the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam
- » Work closely with the ODE to ensure that ACIAR's impact assessment program maintains close links with ODE's activities

Key performance indicators

- » At least five impact assessment studies of completed projects published
- » Impact assessment review completed of at least one program in PNG
- » Pathway analysis undertaken of ACIAR's animal health program
- » Impact of IARC activities in ACIAR's mandated regions assessed
- » 2010–11 Project Leader Adoption Studies published
- » Improved working links established with partner-country, international centre and Australian impact assessment groups
- » A pathway analysis of ACIAR's research investment in rodent controls in South-East Asia delivered

Program management

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