

Pathways out of poverty

Poverty – and specifically how to reduce it – has been put firmly on the international agenda in recent months. The G8 summit and Live8 concerts have raised the profile of the world's poor and established the goal of eradicating poverty once and for all. The United Nations has set its own goals in relation to tackling poverty, known as the Millennium Development Goals. A recently held World Summit, in mid-September, measured progress against these eight goals set by the UN.

In many areas progress has been made; in others, the goals seem further from realisation. The plight of Africa's poor is well documented, but less so that of many farmers and rural dwellers in parts of the Asia-Pacific.

One part of the Asia-Pacific region where this is of increasing importance is South Asia. India is the largest country and the leading economy in South Asia, but also has the highest number of people living below the poverty line, some 220 million, or more than all the poor in Africa combined. The other countries of South Asia also have large numbers of people living in poverty.

For ACIAR, the attention focused on poverty and reducing it is not new. Helping farmers and others relying on agriculture to find pathways out of poverty is the role of ACIAR.

It is achieved through agricultural research. The role of agriculture in creating economic growth at the individual and village scale, and this growth acting as a catalyst to help smallholder farmers lift themselves out of poverty, has been well documented.

ACIAR's work in South Asia, and in the broader Asia-Pacific region, is helping evolve the potential of agriculture to create pathways out of poverty into reality.

PARTNERS IN RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

Partners in Research for Development presents articles that summarise results from ACIAR-sponsored research projects, and puts ACIAR research initiatives into perspective.

Technical enquiries will be passed on to the appropriate researchers for reply. Reprinting of articles, either whole or in part, is welcomed provided that the source is acknowledged.

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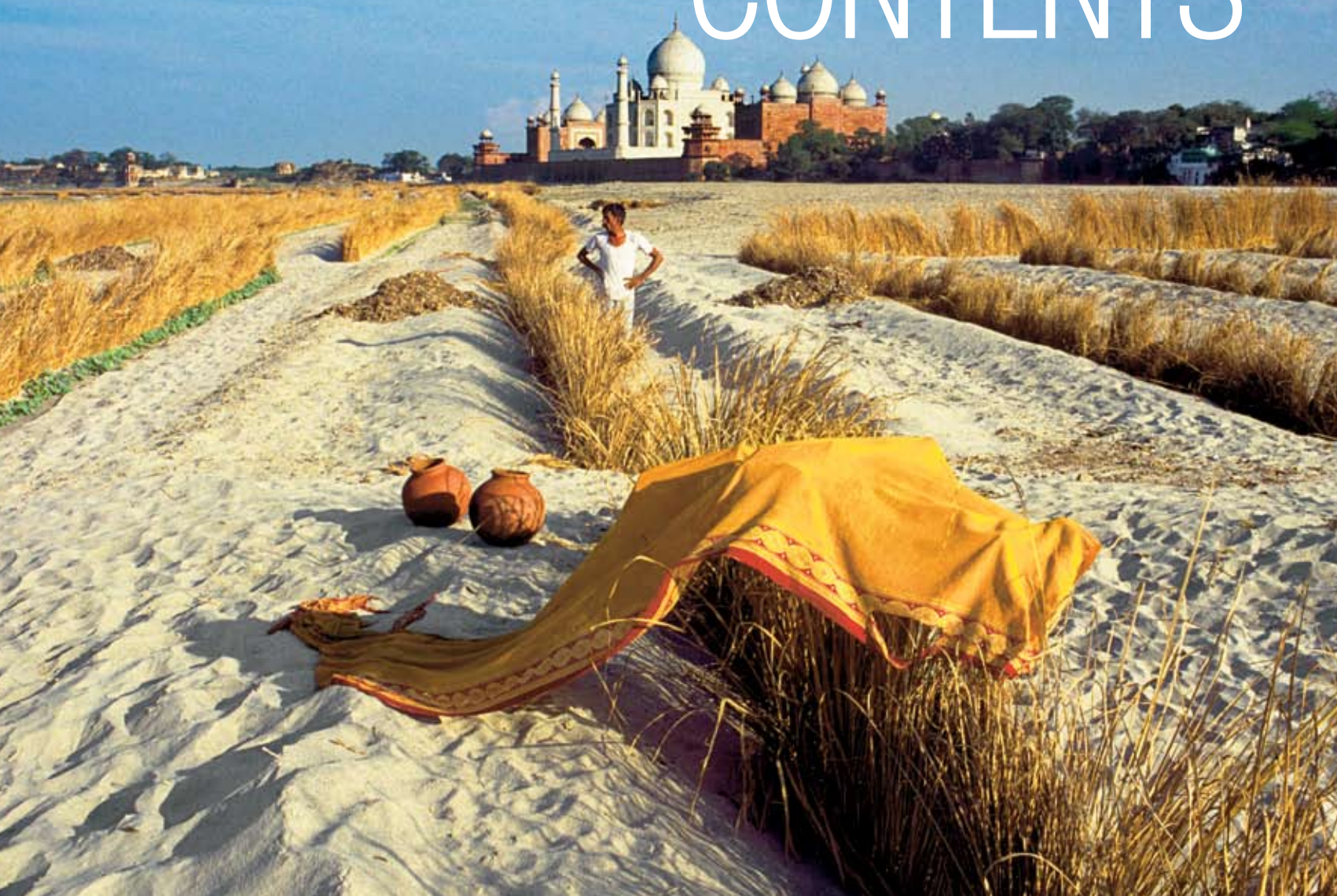


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India's economic growth is moving forward at seven per cent a year, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It already ranks as the 12th largest. Several factors are driving the pace of progress, two of which have been integral to India's relationship with ACIAR. Since the early 1990s successive Indian Governments have worked to deliver economic reforms. These, together with WTO accession and a thriving services sector, have driven economic expansion. This reform has also extended to relations with donor organisations. Since 2003 India has sought jointly-funded projects with smaller donors like ACIAR to help poor smallholder farmers who are in danger of being left behind by the fast-running economy. The majority of India's poor, as in other parts of South Asia, are in rural areas which have yet to feel the full benefits of broader economic change.

ACIAR support in South Asia focuses on improving smallholder crop and livestock production, and management of broad-scale land and water resources. Projects include those that target poor, marginalised farmers in the rain-fed, semi-arid areas.

ACIAR is well-placed to share Australian know-how in salinity, sustainable crop production and disease management – in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as India. ACIAR is working to spread the project outcomes and benefits through these countries. In Pakistan, ACIAR, with AusAID and Austrade, is embarking on a new Agricultural Linkages Program to build Pakistan's capacity in agricultural sciences. The three organisations are developing a program to cover commercial, academic, research and trade links between Australia and Pakistan.

ACIAR is also helping with specific issues in Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal. These continuing projects focus on single issues where Australia's researchers have a comparative advantage. Targeted research in South Asia, home to more than a fifth of the world's population, has the potential to lift many farmers and rural smallholders out of poverty.