

The Expert Panel
New International Development Policy
By email: development.submissions@dfat.gov.au

31 January 2020

Dear Expert Panel,

In response to the call for submissions on the New International Development Policy, I submit the considered thoughts of the Commission for International Agricultural Research.

Yours sincerely



Don Heatley OAM
Commission Chair



ACIAR

Secretariat for the

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COMMISSION FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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New International Development Policy
By email: development.submissions@dfat.gov.au

31 January 2020

Dear Expert Panel,

The Commission for International Agricultural Research welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission into new international development policy.

The Commission has a statutory role under the ACIAR Act 1982 to advise the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the CEO of ACIAR on matters relating to international agricultural research. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is Australia's specialist international agricultural research for development agency. ACIAR's purpose is to broker and fund research partnerships between Australian scientists and their counterparts in developing countries.

Agriculture is central to achieving the objectives of Australian international development policy and the prosperity, stability and security themes of the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper.

Australia has world-leading expertise and capabilities in cross-cutting areas such as biosecurity, water resources management, fire management, climate change adaptation, emissions accounting and carbon farming – all of which are of great and increasing interest across the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia plays a leadership role across the Indo-Pacific region in fostering and supporting scientific collaboration on issues of common concern. Australia is well-positioned to play a 'small l' leadership role in helping countries across the Indo-Pacific region – both individually through bilateral partnership, and collectively through multilateral collaborations – to tackle the big food security, water security and biosecurity challenges (all amplified by climate change) facing the region.

The agricultural components of Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), especially the research and market development aspects, play to Australian strengths in agricultural science and policy.

Since 1982, ACIAR has developed and continued to refine an effective partnership model, working closely with partner countries and agencies on jointly defined priorities well-matched to Australia's technical expertise.

Background

Australian scientists are world leaders in agricultural research. They are encouraged and supported to use their skills for the benefit of partner countries while at the same time contributing to solutions to meet Australia's own agricultural challenges.

The Australian agricultural sector has valuable knowledge and expertise to share with other countries facing similar challenges, including farmers, rural poor, consumers, agribusiness, researchers and policymakers.

Since 1982, ACIAR has supported research projects across the Indo-Pacific region. Our research projects focus on crops, agribusiness, horticulture, forestry, livestock, fisheries, water and climate, social sciences, and soil and land management. To date, ACIAR has commissioned and managed

more than 1,500 research projects in 36 countries, partnering with 150 institutions along with more than 50 Australian research organisations.

Agriculture is central to achieving Australia's foreign policy objectives

Agriculture is central to achieving the objectives of Australian international development policy and the prosperity, stability and security themes of the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper.

Agriculture is central to the following biggest security and prosperity challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region:

- food and nutrition security;
- water security; and
- biosecurity.

These challenges are all amplified by climate change. More profitable, sustainable and resilient farming practices and agrifood value chains are central to climate change adaptation and to a lesser extent, mitigation.

In most low- and middle-income countries in the Indo-Pacific region, agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries remain the biggest employer of people. Increasing productivity in these sectors is the fastest and most efficient way of reducing poverty, especially in rural communities.

Importantly, for many partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region, women comprise a large proportion of people engaged in agriculture, particularly among smallholder farmers. Ensuring that women have access to a fairer share of resources and decision-making has proven to be an effective way of tackling poverty and improving food security and human nutrition and health at a community and societal level.

Australian agricultural expertise is a strategic national asset

While Australia enjoys a modern industrialised economy with a highly urbanised population, it is also a significant agricultural exporter, with a very productive agricultural sector. It is noteworthy that productivity growth in Australian agriculture over the last 30 years has significantly outstripped the economy as a whole, despite the challenges of farming in a geologically ancient continent with generally nutrient-poor soils in increasingly difficult climatic conditions.

Productivity growth in the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors is driven by an effective innovation system, characterised by extensive partnerships between government and industry, between public and private research, and a high level of involvement of farmers in research – especially the top quartile of farmers who produce more than three quarters of total output and most of the profit.

Australia is the only OECD country with a significant proportion of its land mass in the tropics. It has a great diversity of agroecological zones extending from the wet-dry tropics, the wet tropics, through temperate to arid zones, with a wide range of rainfall patterns from monsoonal to Mediterranean, but generally characterised by very high variability within seasons and across years. This means that Australian expertise is highly relevant to the agricultural sectors of most countries from eastern Africa to the South Pacific, many of which are experiencing unprecedented climate variability and less predictable seasons.

Australia also has world-leading expertise and capabilities in cross-cutting areas such as biosecurity, water resources management, fire management, climate change adaptation, emissions accounting and carbon farming – all of which are of great and increasing interest across the Indo-Pacific region. The highly collaborative nature of Australia's agricultural innovation system, based around a mix of

public and private investment through successful models such as the Rural Research and Development Corporations (Rural RDCs) and Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), also enables relatively efficient means of research informing policy. Again, improving linkages between science and policy is of great interest in partner countries across the region.

Science diplomacy is an effective form of ‘soft power’

Australia plays a leadership role across the Indo-Pacific region in fostering and supporting scientific collaboration on issues of common concern.

Agricultural science and research (defined broadly to encompass crops, livestock, horticulture, fisheries, forestry, water, biosecurity, public health and climate) is an international enterprise. Australian expertise is highly regarded, our leading research institutions are well above world standard, and Australians are disproportionately represented in leadership roles in international collaborations like the CGIAR – the world’s largest agricultural research network. But we only produce around 2% of the world’s scientific publications, many in collaboration with overseas research partners. Our leading industries draw on science from across the globe – for example more than 90% of new wheat varieties in Australia rely on germplasm from the CGIAR.

Because Australia is so dependent upon, and so engaged in, international research, our scientists are well recognised and adept at working with international partners in a rich diversity of institutional, cultural and language contexts.

As a middle-sized English-speaking country, neither European nor American, enjoying the advantages of a sophisticated knowledge economy, a mature services sector and deep, relevant technical know-how, Australia is well-positioned to play a ‘small l’ leadership role in helping countries across the Indo-Pacific region – both individually through bilateral partnerships, and collectively through multilateral collaborations – to tackle the big food security, water security and biosecurity challenges (all amplified by climate change) facing the region. At official levels, there is considerable demand for this.

Doing so will generate goodwill and influence for Australia that would be difficult to replicate through conventional diplomatic means or aid projects. It also provides market opportunities for Australian firms in the primary sector, in both goods and services.

Agricultural aid plays to Australian strengths and is in our national interest

The agricultural components of Australia’s Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), especially the research and market development aspects, play to Australian strengths in agricultural and environmental science and policy.

Many ACIAR projects – notably in biosecurity but also in crops, livestock, horticulture, fisheries, water and forestry – have delivered significant benefits back to Australian industries through early detection and better management of pests and diseases, access to better varieties, or improved productivity or resilience.

Many Australian scientists who have made major contributions to the Australian agricultural innovation system say their experience on ACIAR projects has been extremely beneficial and influential in honing their skills, broadening their horizons and shaping their careers.

Australian firms operating overseas are increasingly seeing a need to demonstrate their wider contribution to the communities in which they operate. ACIAR projects provide a quality-assured, ‘safe’ means of making a valued long-term contribution based on sound science.

The ACIAR partnership model is well proven, a well-recognised brand across the region

Since 1982, ACIAR has developed and continued to refine an effective partnership model, working closely with partner countries and agencies on jointly defined priorities well-matched to Australia's technical expertise. The very first ACIAR project in 1982 was on coconuts in the Pacific, and ACIAR has been working there productively ever since.

ACIAR's continuity of presence, the stability of its model (while continually improving) and the duration of its programs (extending over decades in some cases) have delivered very high returns on investment and are highly valued across the region. Several partner countries have 'graduated' from aid recipients to significant co-investors (in cash as well as in-kind) into ACIAR programs. The confidence of partners to co-invest is reinforced by ACIAR's strong commitment to continuous and thorough impact evaluation. ACIAR will soon publish the 100th report in its Impact Evaluation series, which comprises a combination of medium-term adoption studies and longer-term assessments. Few organisations have a comparable evidence base to improve their performance, demonstrate their effectiveness and measure their return on investment.

Many ACIAR alumni – recipients of postgraduate scholarships to study in Australia and current and former project partners – are now in senior influential positions in government, industry and academia across the region. They feel a great fondness, respect and reciprocal obligation towards Australia and are thrilled to get an opportunity to work with Australia and 'give back'. ACIAR has now improved its capabilities to maintain ongoing relationships with its alumni.

The skills, insights and reputation developed through ACIAR's bilateral programs have enabled it to play a disproportionately influential leadership role in multilateral collaborations including the CGIAR, the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) and the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GRA) – the latter two both chaired by ACIAR in 2020.

ACIAR's brokering capabilities and the networks and credibility of its staff (both in Canberra and its ten country offices) provide an efficient means of assisting partner countries to access Australian expertise, and assisting Australian scientists to become engaged in productive international collaborations, deepening their own expertise and extending their networks.

There is considerable potential to build on ACIAR's track record for more strategic and effective aid investment

The ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018-27 provides an excellent platform for growth. Its objectives are closely aligned with the government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper and the Pacific Step Up.

The strategy retains the proven benefits of the ACIAR business model around brokering research partnerships, while adding a much greater emphasis on co-investment with development partners, more strategic investment in building capacity in partner countries and Australia (including new leadership programs targeting women), and greatly enhanced capabilities in outreach and communication to 'tell the story' across multiple platforms.

Importantly, the strategy positions ACIAR to work much more effectively in cross-commodity areas like climate, water, gender, nutrition and One Health (the intersection of animal health, human health and ecosystem health) – areas which are of increasing concern across the region.

ACIAR is currently working to get more involvement of Australian farmers (as well as scientists) in its programs, and to develop new partnerships with Australian agribusiness firms working in partner countries.