

New International Development Policy  
By email: [development.policy@dfat.gov.au](mailto:development.policy@dfat.gov.au)

30 November 2022

On behalf of the Commission for International Agricultural Research, please find attached our submission on the New International Development Policy.

The Commission has a statutory role under the *Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Act 1982* (the ACIAR Act) 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 the Australian Government's specialist agricultural research-for-development agency. Its purpose is to contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research.

ACIAR is an agency of the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio and contributes to Australia's development assistance program.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Fiona Simson  
Commission Chair



**Commission for  
International  
Agricultural  
Research**

GPO Box 1571  
Canberra, ACT 2601  
Australia

**P** +61 2 62170500

**E** [aciara@aciara.gov.au](mailto:aciara@aciara.gov.au)

**aciara.gov.au**

## COMMISSION FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

### SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

#### Background

In a submission to a previous review of development policy (January 2020) the Commission for International Agricultural research (the Commission) argued that regional food and nutritional security (and, therefore, agriculture) are central to Australia's foreign policy objectives, that Australian expertise in agricultural research and innovation is a strategic national asset and that deploying this through development assistance and science diplomacy plays to our strengths and is in our national interest.

This case has only become stronger in the three years since that submission. It is increasingly clear that global food systems need to be resilient in the face of health and biosecurity emergencies and more volatile security and trade conditions. In addition to severe weather events and biosecurity threats associated with mounting climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic brought global supply chain disruptions and work force depletion. International settings and conflicts have delivered trade disruptions, spikes in input prices, and another set of supply chain disruptions and resurgent food security concerns.

Current efforts internationally will not be enough to meet the challenges we face to feed the world a healthy and nutritious diet by 2050. Our current progress must be maintained but on top of that we need further step change to deliver more nutritious meals with less land and water per unit of product, and less environmental cost, in the face of the impacts of climate change, using the entire array of productive landscapes and meeting the dietary and cultural preferences which make food healthy and life giving.

This change will need to engage millions of producers and billions of consumers. Thousands of institutions and businesses will need to work together to tune and re-tune their arrangements to deliver at speed.

As we have seen too clearly during the pandemic and its aftermath, the consequences of challenges and change rest most harshly on those who are already least advantaged. So as food systems transform, the goal must be to also tackle inequities. The solutions and systems developed must ensure everyone is able to access adequate amounts of safe healthy food, and with opportunity for livelihood improvements.

What should Australia's future role be in this global effort?

#### Consultation

In November 2022, the Commission met in Brisbane in parallel with meetings of Australia's Policy Advisory Council and the CGIAR<sup>1</sup> System Council which was hosted by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), on behalf of Australia. The meetings were conducted back-to-back with the TropAg International Agriculture Conference which attracted more than 1000 delegates from more than 50 countries.

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<sup>1</sup> The CGIAR (formerly known as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) is the world's largest agricultural innovation network, with a research portfolio of about USD1 billion per year.

With this significant gathering of global agricultural research leadership in Brisbane, the Commission took the opportunity to host a three-part expert dialogue series on *Food Security and Food Systems Transformation in the Indo-Pacific*, comprising three linked components: a plenary session at the TropAg conference, a Leaders' Roundtable for 26 national and international leaders, and a Science for Food Security Dinner Reception for 150 national and international guests at which the Minister for Agriculture, Murray Watt represented the Australian Government.

Participants in the dialogue series brought a diverse and cross sectoral set of perspectives. They included, for example, the Vice President at the World Bank; the Senior Advisor, Agricultural Development, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the CGIAR Executive Managing Director; the Co-founder and Group CEO of Olam International Limited and Chairman, World Business Council for Sustainable Development; the Chief Scientist, USA Agency for International Development (USAID); the Director-General, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; the CEO International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*) in Kenya; the CEO, Consolidated Pastoral Company; and the Vice-Chancellor, University of Queensland.

The events re-affirmed and deepened our conviction that Australia has much to offer in addressing food and nutrition security in our region and that this needs to go well beyond incremental steps that can too often keep people in poverty and fail to address the system-wide transformations needed to ensure the provision of affordable, safe and nutritious food for all within planetary boundaries.

This submission builds on the insights from the dialogs and is organised around the focal questions for the development of Australia's international development policy.

**What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?**

Most nations in our region are continuing to grow national capability in food production and environmental protection, but this needs to accelerate to meet the rising demand of such capacity. In particular, national agricultural research capacities and linkages to Australia have been a major asset for the advances to date and have relied predominantly on ACIAR and its partners in Australia. Australian research engagement in the region has not kept pace with either Australia's capabilities or the rising demands of the region. The risk is that avoidable food insecurity, triggered by droughts, floods and pests or by political insecurity, will impact large populations.

Feedback on the dialogs was encapsulated in the closing remarks from Dr Juergen Voegelé, Vice President at the World Bank and highlight that in many areas Australia has significant competitive advantage in technical expertise in similar climatic zones as well as facilitating development. His remarks, provide a view from the outside about where Australia can play a part:

*'Australia should share what it knows...the policy content...and Australia should share what it does...how you turn this into action. Agriculture is typically very conservative, farmers...ministers...innovation...investment... (we could) deepen our collaboration with the CGIAR and the World Bank – telling the real story of how you change farmers' mindsets to do things differently, to benefit from it - they make better money, they make a better product, they reduce the impact on the environment, they lower the footprint and they produce healthier food. ... Foreign Affairs should leverage what you are doing in Australian agriculture to impact what is happening around the world. Australia is ahead of the game in what needs to be done by farmers... and need to share because the impact of climate change on food production is urgent. We need to invest now because it will only get more expensive.'*

### **What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?**

This year, ACIAR is celebrating 40 years of operation. ACIAR brokers and invests in agriculture related research partnerships in developing countries to build the knowledge base that supports crucial development objectives drawn from the Australian Government's aid policy priorities. The ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027 guides the agency, consistent with the ACIAR purpose under the enabling legislation and reflecting the Australian Government's foreign policy framework and the United Nations' Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

ACIAR supports capacity building and outreach activities to drive the impact of its research investments, and has a long history of monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of its investments. (See the impact of ACIAR work in agricultural research for development 1982–2022 Volumes 1 and 2 [https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/technical-publications/impact-assessment-100\\_1982-2022](https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/technical-publications/impact-assessment-100_1982-2022).)

In response to global changes outlined above, the Commission initiated an independent mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027 in early 2022.

The recently released updated strategy ([ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2017: Research that works for developing countries and Australia. Second edition – October 2022](#)) builds on the previous strategy and the recommendations of the mid-term review. It sets out new areas of research priority and refinements in research management to build greater impact in a changing region. In the context of this refresh of International Development Policy, the Commission draws the attention of the reviewers and the External Advisory Group to the opportunities identified for ACIAR to:

- continue using the strengths of the ACIAR partnership model which aligns Australian and regional scientists and encourages ongoing joint and individual research, in many cases extending beyond the duration of government-funded programs. Recognising the rapidly developing research capability in some partner countries these partnerships will increasingly reflect joint leadership and investment between partners rather than the historical donor/recipient approach; and
- encourage Australian contributions to multinational research organisations, including the CGIAR, to be allocated to applied researchable issues relevant to the Asia Pacific region.

The revised strategy includes a transition to transformational research initiatives which are mission-directed, transdisciplinary and cross-program. This change could be achieved more quickly and with more impact by a modest and stepped increase in the funds available for ACIAR to invest.

High capability exists within the albeit modestly sized ACIAR for coordinating research resources from Australia with regional needs for research and capacity development.

Maintaining these research resources requires a continuing stream of motivated researchers linked into Australian universities and research organisations, which in turn implies external coordination and continuing support for institutions and individual researchers to commit to this research focus. Combined with investment in research capability in our partner countries and with investment in both outreach and in the necessary scaling out steps, such work benefits and supports partner countries in our regions as well as Australian agriculture.

Research capability cannot be turned on and off over the short term. The impact to date of ACIAR indicates the value of consistent, targeted investment. The mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-year strategy highlighted the importance of continuing to engage Australia's major agriculture related research organisations in this work and identified that the modest level of investment available to ACIAR makes this an increasingly challenging task. Put simply, the funds available have not kept pace with the overall costs and investment required for such research and are less attractive as an area of research focus than would have been the case 10, 20 or 30 years ago.

**How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?**

Regional risks related to climate and food insecurity have earlier been highlighted as food insecurity hotspots that could lead to mass hunger, migration, or instability. Poverty alleviation is relevant in this context insofar as it applies to poor urban dwellers, where part of the solution is to increase the capacity of domestic rural food systems. Joint research with Australia has allowed major advances in the predominant regional (and global) food production systems – still dominated by smallholder producers.

Australia's strength is in the ability of its scientists to work alongside regional scientists in relevant research and its application, as distinct from some other donor-recipient approaches. As observed by Dr Juergen Voegele (Vice President at the World Bank) in Brisbane, Australian agricultural scientists, policymakers and farmers work together to enable necessary change, allowing challenges to become opportunities for better food production, better food products, and with lower input use, less environmental impact and smaller carbon footprint. Such local research addresses multiple risks in periods of change, including climate resilience, nutritional security and food security risks associated with rural-urban migration.

The Indo-Pacific region is a clear national priority for deploying our expertise. This includes a particular opportunity to further develop our comparative competence (in collaboration with New Zealand) in partnering with small island states to address their distinctive development needs.

Nevertheless, there are also opportunities for development policy to make highly targeted use of distinctively Australian expertise in research-for-development in other global hotspots of food insecurity, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

**How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?**

The ACIAR partnership model is an exemplar of the long term, partnership-based approaches to research for development in the multiple sectors that span agricultural research. This does not mean it can be copied directly for development projects or even for other sectors. Nevertheless, policy may benefit from starting with the same ACIAR partnership foundations of mutual respect, shared objectives and face-to-face interaction leading to long term relationships that often extend to familial interactions. We argue that where practical, maintaining these functions and the resulting relationships within the public service as opposed to through contracted providers delivers significant long-term dividends.

Similarly, consistent investment in building research capability in partner countries has resulted in a cadre of senior research and organisational leaders in these countries who have life-time professional and personal ties with Australians. This is an invaluable base for productive delivery of urgently required efforts to achieve the SDGs and deal with the immediate and pressing challenges resulting from climate change and increasing instability.

**What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?**

Agricultural related research is outstanding in Australia. It arises from the continuing need to adapt to a variable harsh environment that is uncommon to major agricultural exporters or wealthy nations. Australian expertise includes expertise in tropical regions, advanced integrative approaches such as One Health and aspects of trade, natural resource management and other policy.

The sector enjoys a strong regional and global reputation that is relatively uncompromised by competing Australian investment in the region. As identified in the strategy mid-term review and refreshed strategy, ACIAR needs to deepen its partnerships and interfaces with the work of DFAT, DAFF and DCCEEW to ensure future impact using the unique ACIAR role in effective delivery of Official Development Assistance and informing strategic policy on global change in agriculture, food systems and climate.

**How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?**

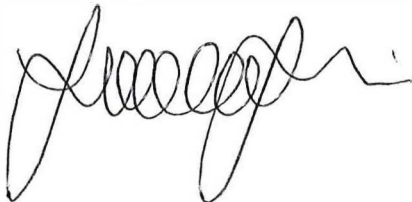
The Commission has a role in policy and oversight of performance and delivery on behalf of the Minister, which works well for a relatively small organisation. Learning is facilitated by the partnership model, and by regional capacity development through scholarships and training. Some aspects of these may be applicable to larger development programs through other organisations.

ACIAR also benefits from the unique composition of a [Policy Advisory Council](#) which is chaired by an eminent Australian but consists of highly credentialed senior business, government and research leaders from partner countries who provide the Minister with a high-quality regional perspective on the ACIAR operations and opportunities.

Importantly, ACIAR has consistently placed a high priority on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) studies which have been used to guide program and project design. The sophistication of the M&E approaches used has also continued to evolve and now includes a recently appointed independent panel of experts who provide oversight and advice on the program and project approaches taken.

**How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?**

The interaction between food and nutritional insecurity and defence highlights an area in which regional security may be supported by both forms of development assistance.



Mrs Fiona Simson (chair)  
on behalf of Commissioners for International Agricultural Research

Dr Sasha Courville  
Professor Lindsay Falvey  
Ms Su McCluskey  
Dr Beth Woods  
Mr Tony York  
Professor Andrew Campbell



**Commission for  
International  
Agricultural  
Research**

GPO Box 1571  
Canberra, ACT 2601  
Australia

**P** +61 2 62170500

**E** [aci-ar@aci-ar.gov.au](mailto:aci-ar@aci-ar.gov.au)

**aci-ar.gov.au**