



Australian Government  
AusAID

## Quality at Entry Report ACIAR in-house Review

Phase 1: Large project variation: Water harvesting and better cropping systems for the benefit of small farmers in watersheds of the East Indian Plateau (Design Document)

Phase 2: Improving livelihoods with innovative cropping systems on the East India Plateau (Concept Note)

### A: AidWorks details *completed by Activity Manager*

|                         |  |                      |               |
|-------------------------|--|----------------------|---------------|
| <b>Initiative Name:</b> | Improving livelihoods with innovative cropping systems on the East India Plateau |                      |               |
| <b>AidWorks ID:</b>     | INK013   | <b>Total Amount:</b> | \$600,000     |
| <b>Start Date:</b>      | 1 July 2011  | <b>End Date:</b>     | December 2012 |

### B: Appraisal Peer Review meeting details *completed by Activity Manager*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Initial ratings prepared by:</b>                           | N/A   |
| <b>Meeting date:</b>  | 12 May 2011   |
| <b>Chair:</b>   | Nick Austin, ACIAR CEO<br>Led by, Dr Ian Willett, Research Program Manager, Land & Water Resources, ACIAR   |
| <b>Peer reviewers providing formal comment &amp; ratings:</b> | Fiona Lord, South Asia Section<br>Russell Rollason, South Asia Section  |
| <b>Independent Appraiser:</b>                                 | 'Alopi Latukefu, Food Security Adviser<br>Dr David Freebairn, Principal Environmental Scientist, RPS Group  |
| <b>Other peer review participants:</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Dr John Dixon, Research Program Manager/ Senior Advisor, Cropping Systems and Economics, Principal Regional Coordinator, South &amp; West Asia and Africa, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Gamini Keerthisinghe, Research Program Manager, Soil Management and Crop Nutrition, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Peter Horne, Research Program Manager, Livestock Production Systems, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Chris Barlow, Research Program Manager, Fisheries, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Tony Bartlett, Research Program Manager, Forestry, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Paul Fox, Research Program Manager, Crop Improvement and Management, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Caroline Lemerle, Research Program Manager, Agricultural Systems Management, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Simon Hearn, Principal Advisor/ Research Program Manager, Agricultural Development Policy, ACIAR</li> <li>– Dr Debbie Templeton, Research Program Manager, Impact Assessment, ACIAR</li> </ul> |

### C: Safeguards and Commitments *(new!) completed by Activity Manager*

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| <i>Answer the following questions relevant to potential impacts of the activity.</i> |   |     |
| <b>1. Environment</b>  | Have the environmental marker questions been answered and adequately addressed by the design document in line with legal requirements under the <i>Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act</i> ? | Yes |
| <b>2. Child Protection</b>   | Does the design meet the requirements of AusAID's Child Protection Policy?  | Yes |

**C: Safeguards and Commitments** *(new!) completed by Activity Manager*

|                           |  |     |
|---------------------------|--|-----|
| <b>3. Imprest Account</b> | Does the business case and risk assessment support the use of an imprest account as the most efficient, effective and ethical use of Commonwealth funds in accordance with the Commonwealth Financial Framework and AusAID policy? | N/a |
|---------------------------|--|-----|

**D: Initiative/Activity description** *completed by Activity Manager (no more than 300 words per cell)*

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 4. Description        | <p>Through this partnership with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) AusAID support aims to improve the living standards of around 228,000 poor rural families across five states in the eastern plateau region of India. The funds will compliment research funding from ACIAR and draw on the lessons of previous ACIAR research in the region. It will build and nurture the social infrastructure of women's groups and support associations to plan and implement sustainable natural resource-based livelihoods. The funding will improve productivity of poor people's farmlands by developing land and water resources and increasing farm production through improved farming practices and crop diversification. This activity aims to reduce the vulnerability of farmers to climate change and enhance food security.</p> <p>The activity will bring together the University of Western Sydney, CSIRO and the Australian National University from Australia; and a large Indian NGO – Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), the Indian Council for Agricultural Research in particular the Central Rainfed Upland Rice Research Station, the World Vegetable Centre (India), and the Advanced Centre for Water Resources Development and Management in India. ACIAR and PRADAN have commenced this activity in the Purulia District (West Bengal). With AusAID funding, the program will be extended in Purulia, and the program will be scaled-out to other areas of the East Indian Plateau; Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal.</p> <p><b>Phase one</b> focuses on capacity building to increase the number of PRADAN field extension staff ("apprentices") and build their technical skills to implement the program. The apprentices will be embedded in PRADAN teams in East India. The learning modules aim to: (i) build local technical knowledge (reducing the longer-term dependency on PRADAN for technical services) and (ii) train staff on technical issues related to soil and water resources in order to implement climate-responsive farming systems that make efficient use of these resources. This first phase will also work with a group of Thematic Integrators and senior management in PRADAN to assimilate the lessons learnt from the first nine years ACIAR-PRADAN research in this field. At least 40 additional apprentices will be trained in one year, and at least 10 field teams with 60-80 PRADAN staff will receive training from an additional 15 State Program Directors and Thematic Integrators.</p> <p><b>Phase two</b> of the program will scale-out the agricultural capacity development program in partnership with PRADAN, from July 2012 to December 2015. The program will equip farming communities in East India with the technology and engagement processes to adapt to the impacts of climate change and improve livelihoods. The program will work with women and their families, in partnership with women's self-help groups and supporting associations, to improve farming practices and crop diversification. It will build the skills of project families to continue water management and cropping improvements after the completion of the program.</p> |
| 5. Objectives Summary | <p>AusAID's overarching aim in this program is to improve livelihoods of local farmers by adoption of flexible and responsive cropping and livestock systems that better utilise available water research. The project's immediate development goal is to improve the living standards of 228,000 families across 5 states in the eastern plateau region of India. This project draws on the lessons learnt from the first nine years of ACIAR/PRADAN research in the region, the project aims to achieve this development objective through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building and nurturing the social infrastructure of women's groups and supporting associations to plan and implement sustainable natural resource based livelihoods for their members.</li> <li>Helping these women and their families realise the potential of their farmland by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>jointly developing and implementing viable micro-level plans to enhance its carrying capacity and productivity,</li> <li>by improving productivity potential of poor people's farmlands by developing land and water resources,</li> <li>increasing the farm productivity of rural poor families through improved farming practices and crop diversification</li> </ol> </li> <li>Creating conditions to sustain and upscale these practices beyond the project period, by building skills of families so that they are able to continue to pursue the above and build their resilience to climate change.</li> </ol> <p><i>Economic benefits:</i> The project will improve household income from on-farm activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased food security, food self-sufficiency increasing from current 6 months to 12 months in</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>the year;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased household income from on-farm activity by more than 8,000 rupees per year; and</li> <li>Greater knowledge and confidence when dealing with salesmen selling inputs such as fertilisers and when selling farm products.</li> </ul> <p><b>Social benefits:</b> The project will improve social conditions of participating families through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in occurrence of forced seasonal migration'</li> <li>Improved nutrition;</li> <li>Improvement in the status and self-esteem of resource poor farmers, particularly women, and their Institutions such as Self Help Groups (SHGs);</li> <li>Greater household expenditure on education of children (especially girls) and family health needs;</li> <li>Improved problem-solving skills with farmers that will increase the likelihood that change will be sustained and be resilient in the face of climate change, and reduce NGO-dependency.</li> </ul> <p><b>Environmental benefits:</b> The project will also have positive environmental impacts through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving catchment management, through altering surface runoff and sub-surface flow, to retain water in the local catchment;</li> <li>Reduce erosion from uplands, due to reduced surface runoff from watershed development infrastructure, and reducing flood damage downstream;</li> <li>Improving surface soil structure, by replacing traditional paddy rice with direct seeded rice;</li> <li>Improving the use of fertilisers and pesticides, through educating farmers on environmental and health impacts.</li> </ul> |
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**E: Quality Assessment and Rating** *(no more than 300 words per cell)*
*completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting*

| Criteria     | Assessment   | Rating (1-6) * | Required Action (if needed)  |
|--------------|--|----------------|--|
| 6. Relevance | <p>The objectives of this activity are clearly articulated and aligned with the 2009 India-Australia Strategic Partnership, which prioritises cooperation on climate change and water resource management. AusAID's Country Situation Analysis (CSA) for India is currently under development, but a focus on improving water resource management and food security in response to climate change is being considered as a priority, given this is an area where Australia has substantial expertise and the poorest and most vulnerable communities are increasingly facing water and food security pressures.</p> <p>It also aligns with the direction of the aid program to increasingly work with whole-of-government partners, beyond small-scale public sector linkages program (PSLP) type activities, and leverage the expertise of Australian institutions in assisting meet the development objectives of our partner countries. ACIAR has a significant experience in India, and through partnership with the NGO, PRADAN, has had an increasing development focus in the poorest regions of India.</p> <p>Participants in the peer review noted that the relevance of this program would be strengthened, if the Government of India was a partner in the activity, to improve the capacity of the government to deliver these rural development services.</p> | 4              | ACIAR will explore whether a partnership with the government agencies is viable, as well as partnering with PRADAN, in order to strengthen the government's capacity to deliver services in the area of rural development. |

**E: Quality Assessment and Rating** *(no more than 300 words per cell)**completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting*

|                          |  |   |   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| 7. Analysis and Learning | <p>Peer reviewers agreed that this activity provides a strong example of ACIAR and AusAID working together to extend an activity that has been highly successful in its first phase, and build on the lessons learnt in the process. This program is extending ACIAR research project on 'Water Harvesting and Better Cropping Systems for the Benefit of Small Farmers in Watersheds of the East India Plateau', which commenced in 2002, and had some significant findings (see variation agreement pages 8-10). The lessons learnt are feeding into the design of the PRADAN Apprenticeship program, but are also relevant to policy makers, and the broader international development community. For example, the participatory (action learning) approach adopted, in which farmers were engaged at all stages from developing research questions, to implementing and maintaining the field experiments, has ensured the project outcomes were relevant to the farmers and that the farmers can successfully adopt the technologies required for improved livelihoods.</p> <p>Participants in the peer review also noted the need for more information on the target groups in regions of where the program will be scaled-out (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal), to compare the demographics and level of access to micro-finance with the Purulia District, where the project has been in operation.</p> | 4 | ACIAR will undertake further analysis of the demographics and level of access to micro-finance in the target groups, in the design of phase two of the activity.  |
| 8. Effectiveness         | <p>The objectives of this activity are clear, measurable and achievable over the timeframe. ACIAR has estimated the specific economic benefits of scaling-out the program.</p> <p>Working with ACIAR and PRADAN is an effective modality for achieving the program's objectives, given their level of experience in the field. The Independent Evaluation, by Dr David Freebairn, notes that the PRADAN team is a highly dedicated and enthusiastic team of professionals.</p> <p>Furthermore, the focus in the program on beneficiaries taking control and recognition of the vital role of women in farming has been key to the program's effectiveness. PRADAN has been successful in ensuring that the technical expertise has been accessible and has resulted in transformational changes at the village scale.</p> <p>Participants in the peer review noted that the effectiveness of this program could be strengthened if linkages with government systems were strengthened, in order to have lasting impact rural and food security policy development.</p>   | 4 | ACIAR will consider how to strengthen the linkage with the national government and national programs, as well as government at the state level, to address the weaknesses in the Government's capacity to deliver services in the area of rural development. ACIAR will consider refining the geographic scope of the program, to concentrate the program on a smaller number of locations. |

**E: Quality Assessment and Rating** *(no more than 300 words per cell)**completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting*

|                               |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 9. Efficiency                 | <p>Working at the village scale through collaboration between Australian agricultural agencies and their Indian counterparts is an efficient way to harness the expertise required to improve farming practices and crop diversification. Furthermore, research on approaches to climate change adaptation is demonstrating that community-focused and participatory approach adopted by ACIAR/PRADAN, is an efficient way to build the resilience of these communities to climate change. Furthermore, harnessing the skills of graduates through the Apprenticeship Program has been efficient in achieving capacity development results.</p> <p>The participants in the peer review noted that there may be opportunities for ACIAR and PRADAN to collaborate with other research agencies (including Australian institutions like CSIRO) and other NGOs, to build linkages and enhance cooperation, and that these should be explored in the design of phase two. The peer reviewers also consider that the efficiency of the capacity building approach should be an explicit part of the program design, so that the research can contribute our understanding on approaches to capacity development.</p>   | 4 | <p>ACIAR will consider how to strengthen their collaboration with other research agencies and NGOs, to strengthen ties and increase cooperation.</p> <p>ACIAR will also incorporate as an explicit component of the program design, analysis on the efficiency of the capacity building approach adopted by ACIAR/PRADAN in scaling-out their activities.</p> |
| 10. Monitoring and Evaluation | <p>ACIAR will manage the monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) of the activity, according to their established procedures, and AusAID will be invited to participate in appraisals. Dr Freebairn's Independent Evaluation of the program notes that the monitoring and evaluation component of the project was implemented throughout the project and has allowed the project to demonstrate change (to the project team and the villagers) when it has occurred. Pradan has applied the Action Learning Cycle (ALC), which has been combined with ACIAR's On-Farm Research (OFR).</p> <p>ACIAR/PRADAN will develop a detailed M&amp;E framework in the detailed design of Phase 2, modelled on Phase 1, which AusAID will be invited to appraise. During the 4 year life of the project, the impacts will be assessed in terms of changed farmer perceptions, changed farm practice, household income and food security. ACIAR will also complete an impact evaluation 5-10 years after the project's completion.</p> <p>Participants in the peer review agreed that the project proposal could be strengthened if analysis on approaches to implementing capacity development programs was strengthened as part of the project M&amp;E approach, and became a central research element of the new phase of the activity (i.e. to answer the questions on the best methods for successfully training apprentices and undertaking capacity development in rural communities).</p> | 4 | <p>ACIAR will also incorporate as an explicit component of the program's M&amp;E framework, monitoring and evaluation of the capacity building approach adopted by ACIAR/PRADAN in scaling-out their activities.</p>  |

| <b>E: Quality Assessment and Rating</b> <i>(no more than 300 words per cell)</i><br><i>completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting</i> |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| 11. Sustainability  | <p>The Independent Evaluation of the program by Dr David Freebairn, found that the cooperative learning approach to program implementation, and genuine application of participatory approaches, has meant that the program has achieved sustainable results. It has been successful because the ACIAR/ PRADAN have targeted the people who have the most to gain from watershed intervention, including rural families, and in particular rural women, who can have a significant leadership role in agricultural management. The evaluation also notes that the PRADAN team was mindful of supporting farmers to manage emerging issues independently, improving the autonomous learning by farmers and reducing the dependency on support.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the sustainability of this program relies on the Government of India's Rural Employment Guarantee Program, to improve the integrated natural resource management infrastructure, which prevents that activity from being self-sustaining.</p>  | 5 | ACIAR/PRADAN will continue to target the program at the village scale, supporting woman and their families. However, a key part of the risk analysis for the design of phase two, will be to consider alternative sources of financial capital for meeting the infrastructure costs, should the Government end the Rural Employment Guarantee Program. |
| 12. Gender Equality   | <p>Gender equality is a central component of the program design. Dr David Freebairn's Independent Evaluation, notes that the explicit recognition of women as farmers can be used as a template for a wide range of development activities. Dr Freebairn noted that the program achieved its objectives through key players in the implementation of new practices being recognised, with rural women being recognised as farmers and experimenters, which was "a crucial element of the project's success". Dr Freebairn noted "rural women represent a large resource of intellect and imagination that was not previously used – for example, they had no decision-making roles in their livelihood".</p> <p>By building the social infrastructure of women's self help groups and strengthening the role of women as decision-makers on farms, the project aims to lead to transformational change. Changes in women's self-perception have been documented in the first phase of the activity, and will continue to be monitored in phase two.</p> | 4 | ACIAR will ensure that at least 50% of the Pradan Apprentices are women, to maintain gender equality.  |

**\* Definitions of the Rating Scale:**

| <b>Satisfactory (4, 5 and 6)</b> |   | <b>Less than satisfactory (1, 2 and 3)</b> |  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 6                                | Very high quality; needs ongoing management & monitoring only | 3  | Less than adequate quality; needs to be improved in core areas |
| 5                                | Good quality; needs minor work to improve in some areas       | 2  | Poor quality; needs major work to improve                      |
| 4                                | Adequate quality; needs some work to improve                  | 1  | Very poor quality; needs major overhaul                        |

| <b>E: Next Steps</b> <i>completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting</i>  |                       |  |
|---|-----------------------|--|
| Provide information on all steps required to finalise the design based on <i>Required Actions</i> in "C" above, and additional actions identified in the peer review meeting  | Who is responsible    | Date to be done                          |
| 1. ACIAR will explore whether a partnership with the government agencies is viable, as well as partnering with PRADAN, in order to strengthen the government's capacity to deliver services in the area of rural development. | Dr Ian Willett, ACIAR | During phase 1 (June 2011 to June 2012). |

**E: Next Steps** *completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the Appraisal Peer Review meeting*

|  |                       |   |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| 2. ACIAR will undertake further analysis of the demographics and level of access to micro-finance in the target groups, in the design of phase two of the activity.  | Dr Ian Willett, ACIAR | Prior to program commencement (July 2011) |
| 3. ACIAR will consider how to strengthen their collaboration with other research agencies and NGOs, to strengthen ties and increase cooperation.   | Dr Ian Willett, ACIAR | Prior to program commencement (July 2011) |
| 4. ACIAR will also incorporate as an explicit component of the program's M&E framework, monitoring and evaluation of the capacity building approach adopted by ACIAR/PRADAN in scaling-out their activities. | Dr Ian Willett, ACIAR | During phase 1 (June 2011 to June 2012)   |

**F: Other comments or issues** *completed by Activity Manager after agreement at the APR meeting*

- AusAID are relying on the quality processes employed by ACIAR in managing its activities. However, this QAE Report summarises the key findings of ACIAR's in-house review, for the design of this activity. From AusAID, participants in the review were 'Alopi Latukefu, AusAID's Food Security Adviser, and Fiona Lord, South Asia Section. AusAID staff at post (Russell Rollason), were also consulted in the design of the activity.

**F: Approval** *completed by ADG or Minister-Counsellor who chaired the peer review meeting*

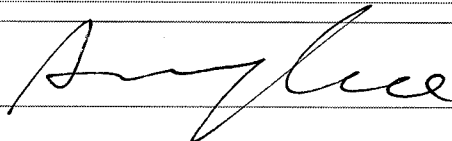
On the basis of the final agreed Quality Rating assessment (C) and Next Steps (D) above:

- ☒ **QAE REPORT IS APPROVED**, and authorization given to proceed to:
- ☐ **FINALISE** the design incorporating actions above, and proceed to implementation
- or: ☐ **REDESIGN** and resubmit for appraisal peer review

- ☐ **NOT APPROVED** for the following reason(s):
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Sun-Hee Lee, a/g ADG  
North & South Asia

signed:



9 June 2011

**When complete:**

- Copy and paste the approved ratings, narrative assessment and required actions (if any) (table D) into AidWorks.
- The original signed report must be placed on a registered file

