

Australia's Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness: Lessons and Opportunities for a more Vibrant ACIAR-PCARRD Partnership

The birth of partnership started in 1982 when the Australian Government established ACIAR to assist and encourage Australia's agricultural scientists to use their skills for the benefit of developing countries and at the same time resolve Australia's own agricultural problems.

The Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) and Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) forged an MOU on scientific and technical cooperation in 1983. Activities conducted between the two parties were on scientific information exchange, scientists and experts exchange visits, provision of equipment, and planning and implementation of joint research projects and trainings or capacity building.

Partnership between the two organizations flourished under research and development and capacity building.

Some of the learnings which could strengthen the long term relationship are:

The high level consultation is a very good initiative that ACIAR has started because planning involves the stakeholders and not only those involved in the projects. The new approach on the major island grouping of the consultation gave more breadth in getting the priorities of stakeholders. We attribute to ACIAR the supply chain approach, which are now incorporated in the way we handle the science and technology interventions we provide in our priority commodities. Likewise, the introduction of the impact assessment procedure made possible a quick and cost-efficient means of assessing the impact of projects.

ACIAR has started an approach to clustering tightly-linked projects. The clustering of tightly linked projects is somewhat adherent to the Systems Thinking Approach and therefore more likely to bring greater relevance and impact.

The scheme of co-funding the programs have also been started as PCARRD has instituted the counterpart scheme. This innovation made possible the accountability and ownership of results.

ACIAR also has strong interest in the greater involvement of other stakeholders including non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in the delivery of research results. This move is parallel to PCARRD's efforts in involving a broad-based stakeholder in its Technology Transfer Program and on some cases, in research projects where private sector involvement is appropriate. Perhaps PCARRD and ACIAR can develop a framework for stakeholder involvement in their projects as public-private partnership is a priority strategy in implementing the PCARRD Corporate Plan 2011-2016.

Likewise, there is also greater attention from ACIAR on the research and research results uptake. And it considers tying up a "delivery" phase for each R&D project, much like providing support to the whole RD&E continuum. This seems a promising strategy.

There is an effort on the part of ACIAR to shorten the time from project conceptualization to implementation. However, some of the time-consuming processes take place at the other side of the partnership – that is, in the partner country. It would be good if on the part of PCARRD, steps are also taken to shorten such time gap. The initiative of PCARRD to build capability on project development is one significant step towards this. If the NARS could come up with well-designed projects, then the time allotted for review, deliberations and revisions would be significantly reduced.

Monitoring and evaluation is a critical aspect of the whole cooperation and as such, both parties should have in place a system of monitoring the collaborative projects, both implemented in the Philippines and Australia. This will provide a better picture of the total benefits of the program and at the same time transparency in implementation.