

Burma

Key statistics	
GDP per capita (US\$)	578
Population (millions)	50
Funding	
	\$m
2008–09 actual	0.14
2009–10 budget allocation	0.14
2010–11 budget estimate	0.07

Medium-term strategy

ACIAR's strategy in Burma is primarily humanitarian, targeting vulnerable populations to improve nutrition and food security. This is in line with Australia's Framework for Humanitarian Assistance to Burma 2007–10 to enhance sustainable livelihoods and protection. The main aim of the program is to develop a small number of multilateral collaborative research projects that can have impacts on improving nutrition and food security, either directly or through increases in farmers' cash incomes. Projects are based in similar agroecological zones to those in Australia—the central dry zone and tropical lowlands. There is a strong need for training due to the isolation of many of Burma's agricultural scientists from international cooperation over recent years.

Position

ACIAR's program in Burma has been fully aligned with the Australian Government's approach to development assistance in that country. This approach is in recognition that over one-third of young children in Burma are moderately or severely underweight. Even though the nation is self-sufficient in food on an overall basis, many families spend 70% of their income on food, and prices are rising. There is general agreement that millions of people are currently enduring substantial hardship, and the situation is urgent enough to require humanitarian action. In the absence of changes in the country's policy settings and institutional arrangements, providing the most disadvantaged farmers with the means of increasing agricultural productivity will remain one of the few options in the short term to alleviate this humanitarian crisis.

ACIAR's aim is to continue to work predominantly through international organisations and NGOs, including Australian-accredited organisations. Working with agencies with a long-standing presence on

the ground has proved that it is possible to deliver assistance in an effective and accountable way. For example, promising results have been achieved in a multilateral ACIAR-project led by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) on improving productivity of legumes in the central dry zone of Burma. Based on the achievements of these projects and scoping missions, ACIAR has developed a new framework for assistance for Burma. However, the implementation of any new programs hinges on political developments in Burma securing favourable and sufficient access to enable ACIAR to effectively deliver, monitor and assess project activities.

Research priorities

If the current international situation changed to allow an increase in future collaboration, priorities would likely to be within the following spectrum:

- » further collaboration for improvement in the productivity of pulse (grain legume) and oilseed crops in semi-arid areas; these crops are important for year-round food security and nutrition, and provide important cash income for small farmers
- » combating poverty by enhancing the productivity of rice-based systems, particularly in areas affected by drought, saline inundation and poor soils
- » enabling strategies for improving the supply of good-quality rice and legume seeds, and providing options for increasing cropping intensity
- » integrated coastal and inland aquaculture production and management of aquatic resources to sustain livelihoods and maintain fish supplies for communities
- » development of a new cohort of researchers and managers with international postgraduate and short-course training in agriculture.

Current project portfolio

SMCN/2006/013 (*multilateral*) Increasing food security and farmer livelihoods through enhanced legume cultivation in the central dry zone of Burma (ICRISAT)



Cultivating fields to remove weeds in the central dry zone of Burma (Photo: David Herridge)

Key performance indicator (2010–11)

- » Results of the project on increasing food security and farmer livelihoods through enhanced legume cultivation in the central dry zone reviewed, and future research needs identified for initiation of a new program if the international situation permits

Key program manager

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After a long day in the central dry zone of Burma (Photo: David Herridge)