

Aik Saath program update

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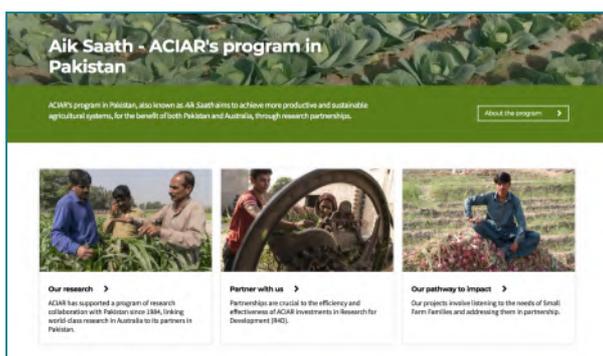
Program Update

Edition #9 | September 2020

Welcome to new readers! We have revised our contacts list for this special edition launching the Aik Saath website. Hoping you find this of interest - previous editions are available below.

Aik Saath is an Urdu phrase meaning Together.

It is also the name we have given ACIAR's program of Research for Development (R4D) in Pakistan. This program is developed together with the Government of Pakistan and many other stakeholders.



As we launch the Aik Saath [website](#), we are grateful to the ACIAR Outreach team, especially [Lynette Thompson](#). Our website enables us to reveal the extent of ACIAR's Pakistan partnership over more than thirty years.

Technology developed in **past projects** is still contributing to efficient cropping and water use, decades later. More **recently**, the ASLP program delivered a wealth of market-focused training and extension resources - these are now easy to access through our website.

Of course, resources from the **current** program are also now online, along with a myriad of stories about how each project partnership is focused on the Aik Saath goal:

That rural poor, particularly women, living in the Punjab and Sindh significantly and equitably benefit from improvements in strategic value chains.

Our new website - tell us what you think!

This quarterly newsletter provides a quick tour around our [website](#), which we hope will foster links to tackle Pakistan's challenges and opportunities in agriculture.

The website will only help if it meets the needs of ACIAR's partners (existing and future). So please think of this as **your** website - a "work in progress". [Share your comments and ideas](#) and we will respond as well as we can.

Contents

1. [Highest Civil Award to Prof Dr Asif Ali of MNSUAM](#)
2. [Partner with us](#)
3. [Our Pathway to Impact](#)
4. [Men, Women and Youth hold keys to progress](#)
5. [Over 30 years of research and adaptation](#)
6. [ASLP - what can we learn?](#)
7. [Livestock - Cattle & Buffalo and Sheep & Goats](#)
8. [Horticulture - Vegetable Value Chains](#)
9. [Crops - Pulse Production & Pulses value chains & Wheat stripe rust](#)
10. [Water and land management - Irrigation Extension & Groundwater](#)
11. [Policy - Participatory Irrigation Management & Horticulture Market Reform](#)
12. [Reaching out under Covid 19](#)
13. [COVID-19 comments in latest Partners magazine](#)

Highest Civil Award to Prof Dr Asif Ali of MNSUAM

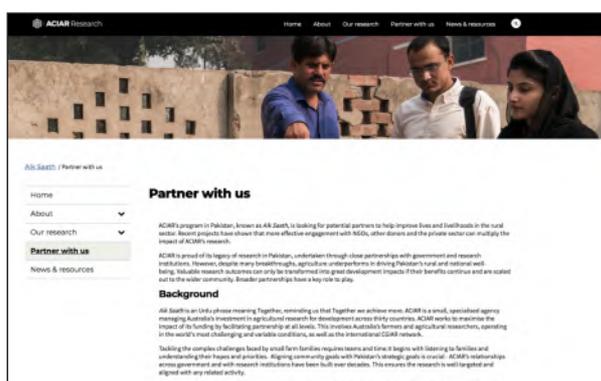
The Aik Saath team warmly congratulates Prof Asif Ali, vice-chancellor of MNS University of Agriculture, Multan who was awarded Pakistan's highest civil honour, the Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Award of Excellence).



Since 2016, Prof Ali has overseen major infrastructure development of MNSUAM as well as strong links with farmers and the agribusiness sector. International partners, including ACIAR, have recognised the potential of this young, energetic, institution to underpin rural development. [Return to Contents](#)

[Partner with us](#)

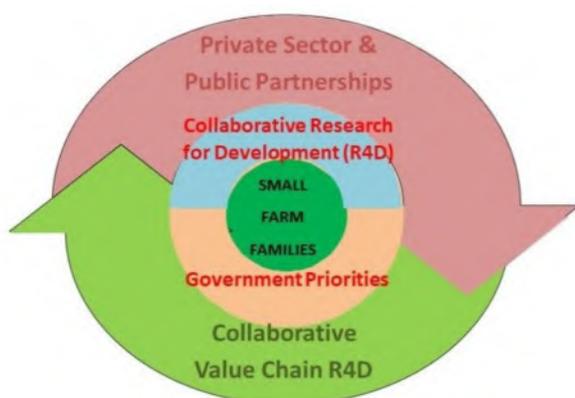
ACIAR maximises the impact of its funding by facilitating [partnership](#) at all levels. This involves Australian farmers and agricultural researchers, operating in the world's most challenging and variable conditions, as well as the international CGIAR network.



Pakistan's agriculture sector faces multi-faceted challenges, requiring "transdisciplinary" approaches, where specialists from many biophysical and social science disciplines collaborate with marketing and economic analysts.

Progress is achieved through the combined efforts of committed partners in Pakistan's universities, national and provincial research institutions. However, partnerships with NGOs and donor agencies as well as the private sector providers of inputs, finance, phone services, insurance and advice also create a holistic approach. [Return to Contents](#)

[Our Pathway to Impact](#)



The target beneficiaries from ACIAR's program are Small Farm Families. ACIAR's strategy is to achieve human development through improving food security and reducing poverty among smallholder farmers and rural communities. This aligns with Pakistan's Vision 2025.

Tackling the complex needs of small farm families requires teams and time. It begins with listening to families and understanding their hopes and priorities. Our Participative Research approach focuses on local circumstances, taking the time to assess community, social and family dynamics. [Read More](#)
[Return to Contents](#)

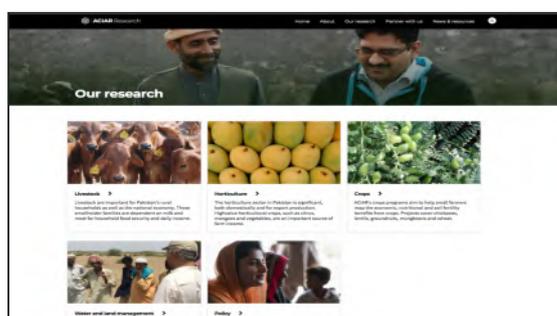
[Men, Women and Youth hold keys to progress](#)

Experience has shown that to maximise the benefits, biophysical research must engage with social research to facilitate deep understanding of communities. This includes addressing the often-hidden role of women and youth, who are crucial to whether project findings can and will be applied.



Women generally play a vital role in agriculture in Pakistan. New approaches could help or hinder their lives. The norms and values governing women's engagement have to be carefully considered throughout. Whether in village communities or in research teams, more is achieved by incorporating both female and male perspectives. There are many examples [here](#) [Return to Contents](#)

[Over 30 years of research and adaptation](#)



ACIAR's partnership with Pakistan has been broad-ranging, but there has been a consistent focus on [water use efficiency and land management](#), including measures to counter salinity.

Other key areas of investment have been [Livestock](#), [Horticulture](#), [Crops](#) and [Policy](#) research.

Scroll on for links to **current** individual projects and their latest news.

Applying agricultural research to address rural poverty is very different to laboratory research under controlled conditions. It requires a long-term perspective and a willingness to review and adapt scientific goals to suit changing circumstances and lessons learned. As an example of this, ACIAR is currently exploring the lessons of the ASLP program (2006-2015) [Return to Contents](#)

ASLP - what can we learn?

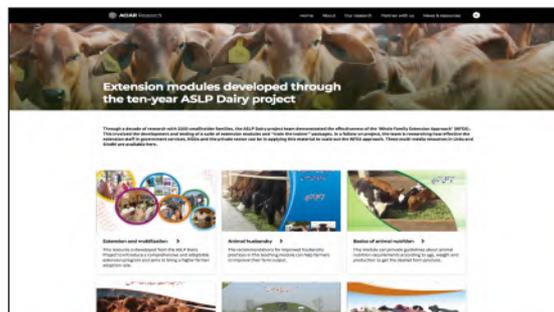
To inform future ACIAR investments, ACIAR has commissioned an evaluation of its programmatic approaches to agricultural research for development. The Agriculture Sector Linkage Program (ASLP) is one of the programs being considered in the evaluation.



The study will examine the ASLP mango, dairy and citrus projects, covering project outcomes and their contribution to program level outcomes as well as project strategies to address gender equity. The evaluation will also consider the programmatic approach used to manage the ASLP and its influence on program delivery and outcomes. [Return to Contents](#)

Livestock

Cattle & Buffalo The ASLP Dairy project was the inspiration for ACIAR's current [Dairy_Beef project](#). This is working with partners to implement across hundreds of villages the Whole Family Extension Approach (WFEA) methods developed in ASLP.



Dozens of resources from these carefully-tested [training packages](#) are also now available through the website.



A new extension partner for the Dairy-Beef project team is the Livestock and Dairy Development Board. LDDDB signed a Commitment Of Collaboration (COC) with the Dairy_Beef project in August. This COC will bridge the gaps in farm advisory services and beef value chain.

It provides the opportunity to implement findings from the project's beef value chain research through the Prime Minister's initiatives 'save the calf' and 'calf fattening'. In addition, the partners will jointly generate strategies for sustainable



development of livestock. The COC was signed by Prof. Dr. Nasim Ahmad, SI, Vice Chancellor UVAS and Dr. M. Fatah Ullah Khan, Chief Executive Officer, LDDDB.

Read more Dairy_Beef project stories [here](#) [Return to Contents](#)

Small Ruminants The [Small Ruminants](#) project team has continued collaboration with its extensive and global network of partners, as noted in their [quarterly highlights](#). Continued linkage with farmers is also essential - the team adapted to COVID-19 constraints by continuing Longitudinal Health Monitoring by phone. They also continued value chain studies by phone, recording farmers' experiences with trading animals for Eid under COVID-19.



The team also assessed how COVID-19 has affected the economic situation, health, and wellbeing of families, by translating the Nossal Institute of Global Health COVID-19 Survey into Sindhi and Urdu languages and developing a Commcare app. [Return to Contents](#)

[Horticulture - Vegetable Value Chains](#)

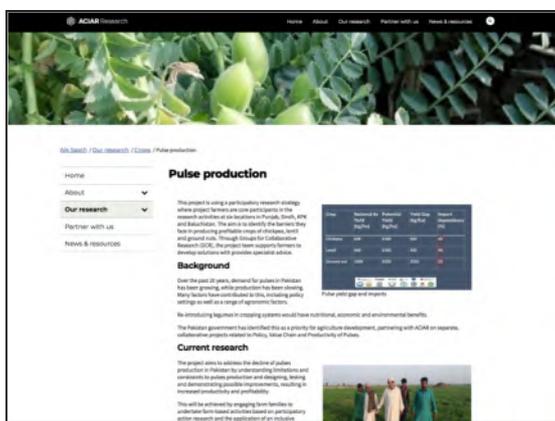
In August, a team of reviewers undertook a Mid-Term Review (MTR) for the [Strengthening vegetable value chains in Pakistan](#) (SVVCP) project. MTRs are one of ACIAR's core tools for independently monitoring progress and supporting teams adapting to emerging findings and circumstances.



Responding to COVID-19 restrictions, the project team set up an interactive website to host the MTR. This contained pre-recorded presentations on each project objective. Reviewers could watch these at any time and share questions in a comments section. Team members then responded to these, building up a rich conversation stream over time. This was complemented by a series of “real-time” online discussions on various topics, involving the most relevant team members. The MTR report has been finalised and the the SVVCP team are adapting accordingly. [Return to Contents](#)

[Crops](#)

Pulse Production This [project](#) applies participatory action research, where the opinions and commitment of the participating farmers are prioritised and they become research partners. Smallholders and researchers work collaboratively to resolve on-farm issues, bringing in other partners as needed. For example, to ensure the supply of quality seed of improved varieties, an NGO called National Rural Support Program (NRSP) is helping to develop a village based seed system.



The August [newsletter](#) describes the team's work to ensure quality through a certification system as well as their approach to continuing effective communication during COVID-19. [Return to Contents](#)

Pulse Value Chains The local team were able to make field visits in August

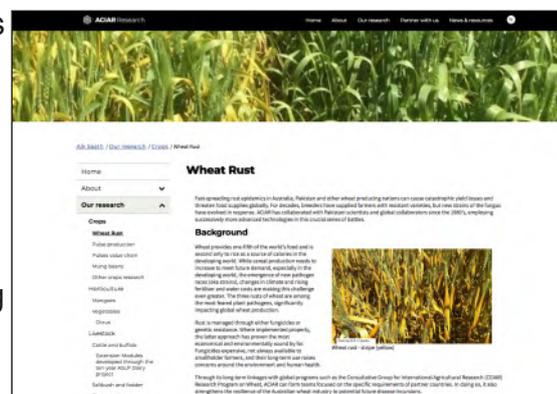
to introduce the project aims. Pulse farmers in Talagang-Chakwal included collaborators on the pulse production project, which is helping them with disease management and improved varieties. Small farmers described their position of disadvantage in marketing their crops profitably. The team also met wholesalers to understand market requirements and start to bridge the gap between consumer and farmer. [Project site](#) [Return to Contents](#)



Wheat Stripe Rust

This [project](#) encapsulates many aspects of ACIAR's contribution to agricultural research in Pakistan:

- It builds on the foundations laid by ACIAR projects starting in the 1980s, to tackle the ever-changing strains of rust disease
- It continues to develop the pipeline of high-level Pakistani expertise, as molecular techniques rapidly evolve
- It brings global collaboration to bear on a serious global threat to wheat - a staple food for the poor
- It is subject to regular high-level technical evaluation as well as economic analysis
- It brings specific benefits to smallholder farmers, who find fungicides expensive, whereas natural resistance reduces concerns around the environment and human health [Return to Contents](#)



[Water and land management](#)



Irrigation Extension

This [project](#) has researched tools and approaches to improve irrigation skills, and hence livelihoods, on small and medium-sized farms, using participatory learning. This has empowered both male and female members of farming

families to undertake projects focused on their own needs and interests.

A key collaborating partner has been the Society of Facilitators and Trainers (SOFT), who have compiled 119 stories of these diverse experiments and activities in the publication “*Farmer Led Research*”. Crucially, the irrigation tools and water conservation practices revealed about 25-30% saving of irrigation time and/or frequency. [Return to Contents](#)

Groundwater In July the [groundwater project](#) launched a [mobile phone App](#) for use by stakeholder communities.

Prof Andrew Cambell, CEO of ACIAR and Dr Geoffrey Shaw, Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan attended the launch, applauding this important joint Australian-Pakistani initiative.



One part of the App (Apna Pani) is for recording well water depth and quality information. The other (Apna Farm) displays many types of land information on a map. With this mobile application farmers can:

- Access current weather data for their farm.
- Easily calculate crop water requirements with three clicks.
- Compare various options of crops and their water needs.
- Get regional rainfall and surface water supply information. [Return to Contents](#)

Policy



Participatory Irrigation Management

The importance of farmer participation in irrigation supply systems has been recognised for many years, but success has been mixed.

This [project](#) has delivered major findings into how the systems for supplying water to farmers are managed in Sindh and Punjab provinces, as well as in India.

In August, Australia’s Deputy High Commissioner, Brek Batley, chaired a

webinar where the project team discussed the lessons for policymakers. This widely-shared webinar complemented a diverse suite of papers in the journal [Water](#) as well as high-level individual briefings for policymakers. [Return to Contents](#)

Horticulture Market Reform

Concluding ACIAR projects such as “Policy and Institutional Reforms to Improve Horticultural Market In Pakistan ” are subject to rigorous external review. This is designed to highlight key achievements and major challenges of activities undertaken.



The reviewers and project team discuss what worked and what didn't work (and why?). This final review provided ACIAR and its partners valuable insights into future project design and management.

The review highlighted the key role played by the project team in advising the Punjab Government.

As a result, a raft of policy reforms are in place to overcome some of the value chain inefficiencies affecting small horticulture producers. [Return to Contents](#)

[Reaching out under Covid 19](#)

All project teams have faced many challenges in adapting to the COVID-19 situation. Fortunately online meetings and webinars are an enormous help in adapting and learning from each other.

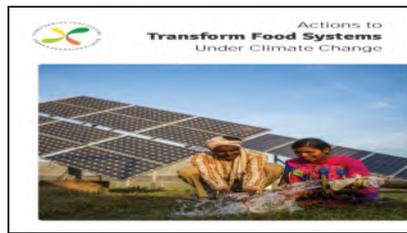


The [social science/gender](#) specialists from most of the Aik Saath projects met online in August and discussed how to keep in touch with female members of farm families, who are not blessed with ICT access. Many of these women have only indirect phone access and, in case of poor signal, they may not be at liberty to leave their home to seek a better connection.

Participants also heard from John Spriggs and Barbara Chambers about the Community Service Centres established in the ASLP Social Research project 2010-2015. We also celebrated the launch of their recent [book](#).



A separate online event focused on gender in rural Pakistan was organised by Dr Anila Afzal of Arid Agriculture University in conjunction with colleagues from UC Davis, UK and Pakistan as well as ACIAR RPM for Social Sciences Dr Jayne Curnow. Resources from these events will be added to the website in due course.



On a much larger scale, the webinar organised by CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) in June literally circled the globe. Kicked off by Prof Andrew Campbell, CEO of ACIAR in

Canberra, this was an around-the-world [virtual relay event](#) to consider the new [report](#), “*Actions to Transform Food Systems Under Climate Change*” and discuss how COVID-19 will affect how farming responds to climate change.

Humera Iqbal, the Dairy_Beef project manager, addressed similar issues at a webinar organised by [Next Gen](#), saying “*Global crisis either climate change or COVID-19 direly needsolutions to sustain farming systems for food security and economic development*”. Humera is conducting a series of online webinars from the platform of “[SheLeadsVet](#)” to support farmers, farm advisors and policy makers by sharing diverse experiences from different parts of the world. [Return to Contents](#)

[COVID-19 comments in latest Partners magazine](#)

The new edition of ACIAR's Partners magazine contains many inspiring stories from around the world. These include reports about how people are managing their research under the challenges of COVID-19.

ACIAR CEO Prof Andrew Campbell comments: "The ACIAR Alumni Research Support Facility is a great example of our rapid response to the pandemic. We received more than one hundred applications for support for COVID-related research projects. The first 40 projects led by ACIAR alumni* are now getting underway, with alumni working in their home countries and receiving formal scientific mentoring and support organised by ACIAR." (* two from Pakistan)

Doing hands-on research when you can't travel

Travel restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the way researchers work. They've posed a particular challenge for those involved in international agriculture, but also presented opportunities.

Lockdowns and domestic and international travel restrictions have seen hands-on experiments—such as laboratory research and field trials—put on hold as scientists, students, technicians and extension staff have had to stay at home.

Here, Australian researchers Dr Di Mayberry from CSIRO and Dr Bradley Campbell from the University of Queensland discuss how they have been adapting to the new work situation.

Adapting to change

Dr Mayberry leads an ACIAR-supported project to improve beef cattle production systems for farmers in Myanmar's Central Dry Zone (CDZ), one of the country's driest and poorest regions.

She leads a team from CSIRO, the University of Melbourne and—in Myanmar—the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department, University of Veterinary Science and Yezin Agricultural University.



Chief Scientist Dr Dan Walker also comments on how ACIAR and its partners are adapting together: 'This is a learning journey for everyone,' he says. 'We're trying to be creative and learn and try new things instead of just doing what we

were doing before or giving up because it was all too difficult." [Return to](#)

[Contents](#)

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