

## AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Many young people leave Australia each year to see the world, but one group does so to make a difference in a developing country.

Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) undertake short-term assignments to help with international development activities in Asia-Pacific countries.

The AYAD scheme places skilled young Australians aged 18-30 in a development opportunity. Placements are sponsored from either the private sector, an NGO or the

government sector through an assignment from that organisation. ACIAR is one such sponsor organisation and has provided more than 20 assignments that have exposed young Australian scientists to research institutions and activities in partner countries.

The reports on this page and page 28 are just a few examples of ACIAR youth ambassador projects that currently cover Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Tonga, the Philippines and China.

## WATERWATCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

In Australia, water quality monitoring through community-based Waterwatch programs has become an integral part of the Australian Landcare movement. In the Philippines, a similar need and interest developed and an opportunity to support this with Australian expertise was facilitated in 2002, when the ACIAR Philippines-Australia Landcare Project placed an Australian Waterwatch volunteer in the Philippines at Claveria. **LOUISE HATELEY** was that volunteer. She writes:

I had just completed a Diploma of Conservation Ecology in 1999 when I heard about a Waterwatch position in my local catchment at Ginninderra, near Canberra, Australia. I spent a year as the local coordinator working alongside the Ginninderra Landcare coordinator, running workshops with community groups to raise awareness about stormwater runoff, and training groups to monitor their local section of the creek.

After this, I helped Waterwatch in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), before attending James Cook University in north Queensland to undertake a Bachelor of Environmental Science. I heard about the volunteer position in the Philippines in March 2002 and had to go.

At Claveria I familiarised myself with the International Center for Research into Agroforestry (ICRAF) Landcare program, and Filipino culture.

The next step was to train facilitators and write material for some of the communities in the area. That took up most of my time, as well as taking school groups and Landcare groups to their local creek for some enjoyable, hands-on experiences with Waterwatch.

They were the most enthusiastic and eager group I have ever met. Implementing the Waterwatch program took longer than I had planned, but I had not appreciated that things would take more time to happen, given the challenges of cross-cultural communication. When



I left Claveria for Bohol six months later because of safety concerns. I felt that I had only just started to get things off the ground and was sad to leave.

In Bohol I was able to get involved in other water quality projects in the area and produced a Waterwatch manual, which is now helping Waterwatch groups in Claveria, Bohol and other areas.

The highlight was the Waterwatch workshop that I organised with ICRAF staff and facilitators, local government officials and NGO representatives. We spent three days reviewing the manual and undertaking hands-on activities. Seeing it all come together, being able to spend time with people from different parts of the country, and to know that I was leaving a useful resource behind, was very rewarding.

Louise's work in Bohol will now be reinforced by the assignment of Carl Mitchell to an AYAD project working with the World Agroforestry Centre and the Bohol Watershed program. Carl will spend 12 months working with the local community in Bohol to develop Community Monitoring and Waterway management.

ACIAR is working with the World Agroforestry Centre and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to draw up Carl's assignment, with extra support from Queensland Natural Resources and Mines and the University of Western Sydney.

**Useful resource:** Louise Hateley at a Waterwatch workshop.

**Photo:** Philippines Waterwatch

## LANDCARE IN THE PHILIPPINES

**Soil erosion is a major problem in Mindanao, and elsewhere, where steep sloping hillsides are farmed. Initial attempts to resolve this problem, headed by ICRAF, focused on the use of hedgerows to reinforce sloping fields.**

**With ACIAR playing the role of facilitator to extend this work, the concept of caring for the land, arising from the ICRAF initiative has been furthered with the Australian Landcare model.**

**The project has ensured that positive environmental interactions have been sustained, by linking farmer groups with training and support networks. This now involves active Landcare groups throughout Mindanao, comprising more than 4500 members.**

**About 500 backyard nurseries to supply plants have been established, allowing the original hedgerow concept and other practices to reduce soil erosion. Farmer research committees have been formed and a central Landcare facility, including an office, demonstration nursery and farm and information centre, has been established at Lantapan.**



Photo: AusAID

## CUTTING POSTHARVEST LOSSES IN MELONS IN CHINA

**K**im-Yen Phan-Thien is working in China as an Australian Youth Ambassador assigned to ACIAR's project that is improving postharvest handling and disease control of melons.

Melons are a potentially valuable source of income for many smallholder farmers. Significant postharvest losses, however, are undermining this potential. Kim's role focuses on designing, implementing and analysing experiments that help characterise natural disease resistance.

Her work began in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, in central China. Since then Kim has moved to Urumqi in Xinjiang in the far west. ACIAR's program in China is increasingly emphasising research that supports agriculture in these poorer regions.

Kim says her AYAD placement has had tangible benefits for both Australian and Chinese researchers. The social and cultural contexts for planning and carrying out experiments, and the approaches for resolving problems, are very different in China and Australia.

She says limited finance and access to resources in the poorer western regions of China have a much larger influence on experimental practice than many Australian researchers would imagine.

These differences can be difficult to bridge via long-distance communication, language barriers notwithstanding.

She feels the facilitation of better understanding between Chinese and Australian researchers is where her role as an AYAD has been most valuable.



Photo: AusAID

## LEARNING TO SING TO A NEW TUNE

**ADAM BARCLAY** is an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development assigned to the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), in Los Banos, Philippines. He writes:

**W**hen I accepted the offer to become a youth ambassador at IRRI I didn't expect to sing "Old Macdonald Had a Farm" to a group of rice farmers in Bangladesh. But that's the beauty of setting off to work as a volunteer – life is not predictable.

I travelled to Bangladesh as an IRRI Communications Officer – a placement facilitated by the Crawford Fund – to increase public awareness of the institute and the importance of rice research, a timely issue in 2004, the International Year of Rice.

There, I gathered material for a story on

an IRRI-led project that saw thousands of rice farmers perform experiments in their own fields which proved that spraying insecticides was a waste of time and money (see the October-December edition of IRRI's Rice Today magazine; or [www.irri.org/publications/today/index.asp](http://www.irri.org/publications/today/index.asp)).

My two American travelling companions and I sang (complete with quack-quacks and moo-moos) for the farmers after they requested a "farm song".

Before coming to the Philippines, I – like many Australians – failed to appreciate the global importance of rice. It is the staple that feeds almost half the planet, and is the single most important source of employment and income for rural people worldwide. Hundreds of millions, including the poorest of the poor, rely on it for sustenance every day.

## POSTHARVEST TREATMENT OF MELONS

**ACIAR funded an earlier project, 'postharvest handling and disease control in melons', which affirmed the importance of the melon industry in Western China and the scope for improvements in disease control and supply chain technologies.**

**The latest project aims to improve postharvest disease control and market quality, and improve returns to growers in China and Australia.**

**Project activities include the strategic application of preharvest treatments to boost natural defence mechanisms in melons, and postharvest treatments to control disease and maintain quality.**

**Researchers will also develop and test interventions that improve supply-chain management, analyse the economic benefits associated with using modern postharvest technologies and transport systems, and identify practical options to improve farmer profitability.**

## IRRI AND AUSTRALIAN AID

**Adam Barclay is working at IRRI, one of the International Agricultural Research Centres that receive funding for core activities and projects from ACIAR, as administrator of the Australian Government's contribution to these centres.**

**IRRI is a centre of particular strategic importance to the Australian aid program. It is the centre dealing with rice (the major staple grain in the Asia-Pacific region). IRRI has helped facilitate the global exchange of more than 40,000 plant breeding lines and varieties since 1975.**

**National breeding programs have used more than 3000 breeding lines and cultivars to improve local varieties in 64 countries, with an estimated value to the world economy of \$US1477.5 million.**