

# ACIAR Annual Alumni Survey 2021

The 2021 Annual Alumni Survey was conducted in December 2021. Online surveys were distributed to alumni, with reminders issued periodically to prompt completion. By survey close, 172 responses were received. Of these, 32 incomplete and duplicate responses were removed.

**Survey data represents responses from 140 alumni from 25 countries.**

## Overall satisfaction

Alumni reported very high levels of satisfaction with their capacity building support from ACIAR:

Excellent	120	86%
Satisfactory	15	11%
I am unsure	5	4%
Disappointing	0	0%
Total	140	

## Respondent snapshot

Key features of the respondents:

- Evenly split between male (49%) and female (51%)
- Included two alumni with a disability
- Majority (72%) were aged between 35 and 54
- Most commonly respondents were alumni of JAF(58%), followed by JDF (29%)
- Philippines alumni strongly represented (29%) followed by PNG (12%), Indonesia (8%), Myanmar (6%) and Pakistan (6%)
- Five alumni were in Australia: 2 from Indonesia and 3 from the Philippines
- 25 alumni (16%) had completed more than one ACIAR capacity building program, most commonly JAF and JDF (2 men, 6 women).

Table 1. Gender		
Male	69	49%
Female	71	51%
Prefer to specify another way	0	0%
Total	140	

Table 2. Disability		
No	137	98%
Yes	2	1%
Blank	1	0%
Total	140	

<b>Table 3. Age Group</b>		
25-34	16	11%
35-44	50	36%
45-54	51	36%
55-64	21	15%
65+	2	1%
Total	140	

<b>Table 4. Capacity Building Program</b>		
John Allwright Scholarship	81	58%
John Dillon Fellowship	41	29%
Agribusiness Masterclass	13	9%
JAF Exec. Leadership (JAFel)	10	7%
Meryl Williams Fellowship	9	6%
USP Scholarships 2007-2019	5	4%
Australia - Africa Plant Biosecurity Partnership 2017	4	3%
Pacific Plant Biosecurity Partnership 2021	1	1%
Unitech PNG Scholarship 2005-2011	0	0%

<b>Table 5. Home Country</b>					
Philippines	40	29%	Malawi	2	1%
Papua New Guinea	17	12%	Malaysia	2	1%
Indonesia	11	8%	South Africa	2	1%
Myanmar	9	6%	Timor-Leste	2	1%
Pakistan	8	6%	Bhutan	1	1%
Nepal	7	5%	Egypt	1	1%
Viet Nam	7	5%	Ethiopia	1	1%
India	6	4%	Kenya	1	1%
Lao PDR	6	4%	Nigeria	1	1%
Solomon Islands	5	4%	Tanzania	1	1%
Bangladesh	4	3%	Uganda	1	1%
Cambodia	2	1%	Zambia	1	1%
Fiji	2	1%			

<b>Table 6. Home country (by ACIAR office)</b>		
Philippines	40	29%
South Asia	26	19%
Cambodia/Lao/Myanmar/Malaysia	19	14%
Papua New Guinea	17	12%
Africa	11	8%
Indonesia	11	8%
Pacific	9	6%
Viet Nam	7	5%
Total	140	100%

<b>Table 7. Respondents who have completed &gt;1 CB program</b>			
	Male	Female	Total
JAF + JDF	2	6	8
JAF + JAFel	6	3	9
JDF + Agribusiness Masterclass	1	1	2
JDF + MWF	0	1	1
JAF + JDF + Agribusiness Masterclass	0	1	1
JAF + JDF + JAFel	0	1	1
JAF + Agribusiness Masterclass	0	1	1
Total	9	14	23

- Only 5 alumni who responded were in Australia at the time of the survey (2 from Indonesia, 3 from Philippines).

## Career

### Employment status

At the end of 2021, amongst the 140 alumni who responded to the survey:

- 89% of alumni (n=124) were employed
- Of those not employed, almost half (43%) were doing PhD or other further study, with equal numbers of men and women
- Other reasons for not being employed included retirement, end of their ACIAR project employment, planned employment break, dismissal for political reasons, and doing small scale farming.
- Male alumni were more commonly not employed (13%) compared to female alumni (7%)

<b>Table 8. Organisation type (employed alumni)</b>		
University of tertiary institution (i.e. institution can award formal qualifications)	42	34%
Government ministry or department	28	23%
NGO, development or other international organisation	18	15%
Government research institution which cannot award formal qualifications	17	14%
Other (please specify)	13	10%
Private research institution which cannot award formal qualifications	3	2%
Missing data	3	2%
Total	124	

### Career progression

*“In a year, I obtain double promotion. The second one (Principal Scientific Officer) is for having my PhD degree. Actually, in my research life, there are two phases before ACIAR JAF Fellowship and after the ACIAR PhD phase. Of which the second one is more vibrant, glowing, and honourable. I would thank ACIAR for everything.”*

- 43% alumni reported they are in a higher position now (n=53)
  - 45% of women (n=29) and 40% of men (n=24)
- 98% of alumni say that ACIAR support contributed to them reaching this higher position
  - 79% of alumni (n=42) attribute that higher position to ACIAR support, 'to a large extent', with another 19% (n=10) reporting that ACIAR support assisted 'to a moderate extent'

*"I know for sure that without the qualification acquired through the JAF scholarship in 2013, I would not be able to gain employment with international and regional organisations in the Pacific Islands."*

<b>Table 9. How ACIAR capacity building contributed to higher position</b>		
	Total	
Network, relationship with key people or organisations	44	83%
Personal growth (e.g. greater confidence, new ideas, higher ambition)	44	83%
Technical skills and knowledge	42	79%
The qualification itself	34	64%
My attachment to an ACIAR research project	27	51%
My reputation as an ACIAR alumni	20	38%
English language skills	42	79%
Work experience/ placement I completed during my program	16	30%

For women alumni who had achieved a higher position, the top three reasons identified were:

- Network, relationship with key people or organisations (86%)
- Personal growth (e.g. greater confidence, new ideas, higher ambition) (83%)
- English language skills (76%)

For men alumni in a higher position, the top three reasons identified were:

- Technical skills and knowledge (88%)
- English language skills (83%)
- Personal growth (e.g. greater confidence, new ideas, higher ambition) (83%)

<b>Table 10. How ACIAR capacity building contributed to higher position (by gender)</b>				
	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
Network, relationship with key people or organisations	19	79%	25	86%
Personal growth (e.g. greater confidence, new ideas, higher ambition)	20	83%	24	83%
Technical skills and knowledge	21	88%	21	72%
The qualification itself	14	58%	20	69%
My attachment to an ACIAR research project	11	46%	16	55%
My reputation as an ACIAR alumni	7	29%	13	45%
English language skills	20	83%	22	76%
Work experience/ placement I completed during my program	7	29%	9	31%

*“The research skills like proposal development, data collection, methodological knowledge, data analysis skills, academic writing ... that I gained during my PhD supported me exceptionally for my career development. The conceptual knowledge helped me to deepen my understanding on the subject area to discuss with my team and build my confidence. In addition, the JAFel leadership training was another remarkable training that helped me to thrive in the research field that I am working now. I am hugely indebted to John Allwright Fellowship for changing my life in a good way 😊”*

### Current work

- Most commonly alumni report working in social sciences (including agricultural economics, social research, development, M&E), horticulture and natural resource management (including water).

<b>Table 11. Current field of work</b>				
	Total		Male	Female
Social sciences	26	21%	11	15
Horticulture	22	18%	11	11
Natural resource management (including water)	19	16%	12	7
Broadacre crops	11	9%	5	6
Forestry	10	8%	5	5
Livestock	8	7%	4	4
Other non-agriculture	6	5%	1	5
Agribusiness	7	6%	3	4
Other agriculture	5	4%	4	1
Fisheries	4	3%	2	2
Soil science	3	2%	1	2
Total	121	100%	59	62

Table 12. Still using skills, knowledge from ACIAR capacity building				
	Male	Female	Total	
A great deal, they are very relevant	55	55	110	83%
A moderate amount, they are somewhat relevant	12	9	21	16%
A little, but they are not very relevant to my current work		1	1	1%
Unsure		1	1	1%
Total	67	66	133	

## Research

Table 13. Current work includes				
	Male	Female	Total	
Research	42	49	91	76%
Teaching/ skills development	29	28	57	48%
Research management	28	25	53	44%
Research supervision	29	18	47	39%
Organisational development and improvement	20	20	40	33%
Senior organisational management/ leadership	22	16	38	32%
Policy development	8	16	24	20%

- More specifically, 81% of alumni indicated that **agricultural** research was a substantial or moderate part of their work
- Further, only 11% of alumni indicated that their current work had no link to agricultural research
- Most alumni are publishing (64%)
  - Almost half (44% who responded) produced 1-2 publications in 2021
  - One in ten (9%) produced 5 publications or more in 2021

Table 14. Publications produced in 2021				
	Male	Female	Total	
1-2	24	29	53	44%
None	20	24	44	37%
3-4	10	3	13	11%
5 or more	5	6	11	9%
Total	59	62	121	

- Alumni reported contributing to securing new research funding in 2021:
  - 28% of respondents said they made a major (19%) or minor (9%) role

*“...helped develop integrated non-chemical based approaches against key insect pests of rice and vegetables through participatory action with farmers and key stakeholders.”*

- 29% of alumni said they had contributed to the development of new technologies in 2021, such as improved crop varieties, better production processes etc

*“We have commercialized ... hybrid rice varieties ... so that these varieties will not remain in the breeding institutions but become available for cultivation by a large number of smallholder rice farmers ... In addition to the new varieties, we are also promoting the use of complementary technologies (land preparation, seed sowing, transplanting/direct seeding, integrated crop management, harvest and post-harvest technologies) so that growers can maximize the genetic potential of the new varieties and improve their incomes.”*

### ACIAR involvement

- Almost half of survey respondents (47%) had an involvement with ACIAR work at the end of 2021.
  - 40% (n=48) were part of a current ACIAR research project
  - Men were slightly more often part of a research project than women

Table 15. Currently working with ACIAR?				
	Male	Female	Total	
No, not at the moment	26	37	63	53%
Yes, I'm part of an ACIAR research project team	28	20	48	40%
Other (ACIAR staff)	0	1	1	1%
Yes, I have other professional collaborations with ACIAR (but not a current research project)	4	3	7	6%
Total	58	61	119	

### Networks and links

*“I have used my Australian relationship in helping connecting my research colleagues in Laos and Australia to get to know about each others and form a good relationship. They are now working together in a new ACIAR project, which is focusing on the mobile finance research in Laos. This project is a collaborative project between the University of Adelaide and the National University of Laos, together with other research counterparts.”*

- Amongst alumni who spent time in Australia as part of their capacity building, almost all report still having Australian networks and links (95%)
- Most commonly these links are with ACIAR Project Leaders (86%), and Australian staff at the university where they studies (67%).
- One third (33%) reported links with broader Australian community members.

*“I still keep in contact with my two supervisors from the University of Queensland as we have an active ACIAR project collaboration. Even if there was no ACIAR project collaboration, I am still in contact with fellow ACIAR fellows and recently came into contact with one of them from CABI, UK.”*

*“Since I completed my Master in Australia in 2013, I have using my Australian relationships by interacting with project leaders in other Australian projects, and the University of Melbourne project. These projects have linked me and my institute with a strong relationship, since I was employed by CARDI... I feel that I still have relationship with ACIAR.”*

## COVID-19

The survey invited alumni to tell ACIAR how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their work and their lives, whether positive or negative.

*“COVID19 is terrible! We have an active ACIAR project in the Solomon Islands and we cannot travel there to meet with the staff on ground and do site visits due to travel restrictions. Also, applying for an ACIAR scholarship was put off due to Covid and that pushed my plans now to apply in 2022 for 2023 intake. Here at the work place COVID 19 has the same negative impact that site visits around PNG have been put off including the company stopping any recruitment to scale down on costs.”*

Coding of qualitative responses shows that in terms of negative effectives, alumni most commonly reported that:

- pandemic restrictions had constrained their ability to conduct field work (n=30)
- research projects had been delayed or completion postponed (n=27)

Other negative effects of the pandemic included:

- loss of work, income and general economic downturn
- loss of face-to-face interaction for teaching and collaboration

Interestingly, though, many alumni reported both negative and positive effects, reflecting a somewhat philosophical perspective on the challenges of the pandemic.

*“The COVID19 pandemic was a blessing in disguise as it has given me the opportunity and challenges to manoeuvre through obstacles to keep the ACIAR project activities going. In fact I see it as a test of my leadership and management skills although the pandemic affected the entire project in many negative ways.”*

Some alumni reported stress, concern and anxiety about the pandemic, their family wellbeing, and also about their work and careers. Some noted that, despite this, they had also become more resilient and developed new ways to manage their work and life.

*“Negative effects in some ways, but also challenged us to be more flexible, agile and innovative in looking for ways to ensure the program continues in such a COVID-19 situation.”*

*“On one hand, the negative impact of COVID-19 for my study is the major change of my topic. On other hand, the positive impact is that it opened up new collaborations and exciting research topics that are also relevant to ACIAR's interest, especially in the context sustainable agriculture and climate change.”*

Some alumni indicated that there were positive sides to the pandemic, although these were mostly not specified.

- The most common positive aspect of the pandemic (n=15) was that it prompted new ideas or created new opportunities.
- Some alumni also welcomed the opportunities to join conferences and other international meetings or events online.
- Others appreciated the additional flexibility which came from working from home.

*“There is a good aspect of Covid is that it has made organisations allow work from home, made them realise that it is possible to remain flexible yet can help bring an outcome which is essential to meet gender needs of researchers especially women.”*

### Alumni involvement

Alumni engagement was especially challenging in 2021, with most countries imposing restrictions on movement and gathering for some or most of the year. Fewer alumni events took place.

*“It is an opportunity for returnees to meet and exchange their own work experiences. I think the COVID issues has impacted alumni opportunities greatly, thus limiting the promised potential that alumni could have brought into the ACIAR returnees and alumni.” (PNG)*

Respondents to the survey included 70 individuals (55%) who did not participate in any alumni event, although 30% had in the past.

Table 16. Alumni involvement in 2021				
	Male	Female	Total	
Yes, online	17	23	40	31%
No, but I have in the past	23	15	38	30%
No, and I never have	16	16	32	25%
Yes, in person	9	8	17	13%
Total	65	62	127	

Regardless, most alumni who responded to the survey feel a sense of inclusion in the ACIAR alumni community (82%).

*“The ACIAR alumni network is a really good network between all scholars, researchers and Australian from the relevant universities. I can learn from different aspects from this network when they share any research capacity building information and scientific researches from the networks. It is also building a strong network between each scholars which come from different continents.” (Cambodia)*

Although in very small numbers, women more commonly indicated that they did not feel included in ACIAR alumni (8%) compared to men (5%).

<b>Table 17. Sense of inclusion in ACIAR alumni?</b>				
	Male	Female	Grand Total	
Yes	55	48	103	82%
No	3	5	8	6%
I prefer not to answer	6	9	15	12%
Grand Total	64	62	126	

*“I am happy with ACIAR Alumni activities especially the opportunities given to the alumni for research projects such as ARSF. I would like to see this continue.” (PNG)*