

A woman wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a dark cap is standing in a field of tall grass. She is looking upwards and to the right, with her hands near a tree trunk. The background is filled with green foliage and trees.

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**Capacity
building**

Capacity building

Science and innovation are critical to advancing agriculture and livelihoods in the Indo-Pacific region. However, of equal importance to our partner countries is the development of individual and organisational science and policy capability to implement research outcomes.

Developing capability in partner countries is a key priority for ACIAR to maximise the adoption of new knowledge and technologies to contribute to our strategic objectives. The ACIAR Capacity Building Program identifies and establishes opportunities for individuals and organisations in partner countries to boost technical, policy and management skills in agricultural research-for-development. To achieve this, we facilitate programs in scientific research, leadership, management, policy and governance with our partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

In 2022-23 the program will return to face-to-face learning, after several years of remote delivery because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While face-to-face is the preferred mode of delivery, we will draw on the experience of remote delivery and apply some of the benefits discovered during this period. At the same time, we will continue to develop ACIAR Learn, a bespoke online learning portal, to offer flexibility and greater access to learning opportunities in our program.

This year we will also work towards a stronger integration of our Capacity Building Program with the Research Program. We will work to embed more strategic capacity building initiatives at the planning stage of selected research projects and facilitate connections between the extensive alumni network and current research projects and opportunities.

John Dillon Fellowship

We have been delivering the John Dillon Fellowship for 20 years. The program develops the leadership and management skills of mid-career professionals, particularly scientists, researchers and economists working in agriculture research-for-development in ACIAR partner countries. To date, there are more than 180 alumni of the program across our partner countries.

In 2022-23, we will be completing the program for cohorts in the Philippines and Vietnam and beginning new cohorts in Bangladesh and the Pacific Region in partnership with our provider, the University of New England. In 2022-23, ACIAR is continuing to deliver the program in individual country cohorts of up to 18 participants with a strong focus on cross-organisational collaboration and strengthening ties with Australian partners. This approach further bolsters Australia's approach to science diplomacy.

Meryl Williams Fellowship

ACIAR launched the Meryl Williams Fellowship Program in 2019. This initiative works with women agricultural researchers, providing them with the skills and knowledge to take on greater leadership positions in their employing institutions. The fellowship contributes to more secure food systems and our strategic objective of gender equality and women's empowerment by providing women in agricultural science with greater access to leadership resources, building collaborative networks, supporting career advancement and driving institutional progress towards gender equity. The fellowship is delivered by the University of New England. In 2022-23 the first cohort of fellows will conclude the program with face-to-face workshops in Australia in November.

The second cohort of the Meryl Williams Fellowship will meet in Australia for the first time in August to formally start the program. The cohort has been engaging in mentoring activities online for the last 12 months and will use their time in Australia to consolidate their learning and develop career development plans to implement until their final workshop in late 2023.

John Allwright Fellowship

In 2022-23 John Allwright Fellows who were previously impacted by travel restrictions are starting or restarting their studies in Australia. There are currently 37 fellows in the program. Applications for study in 2023 will be assessed and offers to new fellows made.

During the year the selection criteria for the John Allwright Fellowship will be revised for the 2024 round to ensure it better reflects the strategic priorities of the countries in which we work and current ACIAR research projects. This follows changes to the criteria for the 2023 round that identified priority countries for applications.

In 2022-23, the John Allwright Support Facility will provide support, advice and direction to John Allwright Fellowship scholars and ACIAR. The facility includes regular check-ins with fellows during their higher degree research program. This includes both academic and welfare support, noting the significant challenges associated with research during a global pandemic. The facility will primarily act as a second layer of support to provide advice and hands-on assistance to help the fellows achieve their qualifications and advise ACIAR on how we can improve management of the Fellowship.

The John Allwright Fellowship Executive Leadership program continues to be a key mechanism to enhance leadership skills development for fellows in Australia. The program equips the fellows with leadership and management skills designed to support their return to the workplace and will be revised for ongoing implementation this financial year.

Pacific scholarships

Our longstanding agricultural research scholarship program with the University of South Pacific was redesigned, expanded and renamed PASS-CR (Pacific Agricultural Scholarship Support and Climate Resilience program). 2021 saw the inclusion of scholarships at Fiji National University, and a return to offering PhD scholarships. Currently, there are 29 Pacific scholars studying under this program at either university, with this number set to expand as we finalise the 2023 intake. Scholars are aligned to an ACIAR research project in agriculture, forestry and fisheries and have an Australian co-supervisor. Through PASS-CR, ACIAR aims to support new generations of Pacific agricultural researchers who are equipped to tackle and address the challenges facing Pacific agriculture now, and into the future.

The redesigned PASS-CR academic support program is being delivered primarily through the University of Sunshine Coast's Australian Centre for Pacific Island Research, in conjunction with Southern Queensland University, Central Queensland University and Science Research Organisation of Samoa. Through PASS-CR, Pacific students and staff will have access to the extensive Pacific Agriculture Information System, which houses more than 1000 Pacific agricultural records. This will address the difficulty researchers have in locating information about their own countries.

The PASS-CR academic support program extends beyond awarding scholarships and engages both with the Schools of Agriculture and Offices of Research at University of South Pacific and Fiji National University, providing workshops, research training and networking to scholars and their supervisors.

Activities in 2022-23 include support to locate strategic research priorities, monthly Pacific seminars (which are jointly presented to Pacific and Australian students) and higher degree research supervision workshops for students and academics.



PASS masters scholarship recipient, Ms Nirma Nadan conducts her research on the on *Actinobacteria* as a bio-control approach for managing bacterial wilt in tomatoes. Photo: Nirma Nadan

Alumni program

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alumni Research Support Facility was opened for applications. This targeted activity provides up to \$20,000 for small research activities that build resilience and respond to the emerging challenges that COVID-19 has placed on agricultural systems in our partner countries. The program will conclude in August 2023. Across the 3 phases of the program, the facility is supporting 103 small research projects led by ACIAR alumni across the Indo-Pacific. In 2022-23 the final research projects will be completed for participants from the first 2 rounds of the program, some 65 small research activities. We will be working closely with this cohort of researchers to support them to undertake outreach activities to ensure this research has maximum impact.

During 2022-23, we will be continuing to deliver our new Global Alumni Strategy, with an increased focus on supporting alumni through the post-COVID operating environment. The aim of this strategy is to engage with ACIAR alumni to develop the skills, knowledge and networks of agricultural researchers and scientists to contribute to positive development outcomes in the agricultural research-for-development sector.

Under the Global Strategy, ACIAR Country and Regional Offices will continue to implement their 3-year alumni engagement plans. These plans have identified the priorities and interests of each country's alumni. From these, annual plans identify a program of activities to be implemented at the country and regional level, including training workshops (both online and in-person), networking events and new opportunities for alumni.

In 2022-23, we will continue to build on our virtual alumni network, ACIAR Alumni 360, developing pathways for further engagement with ACIAR work. The platform is designed to be the central mechanism for alumni to interact with ACIAR and the greater alumni network. Country Office staff facilitate about events, research collaborations and discussion forums. ACIAR Alumni 360 also includes information on the Capacity Building Program, including calls for applications to our fellowships, funding opportunities, publications and other resources. There are currently around 600 active members on the platform, and we expect this will continue to grow in 2022-23.

ACIAR Learn (online learning)

ACIAR in partnership with University of Queensland and Catalpa International piloted a new mobile-learning platform, ACIAR Learn, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform is a bespoke online learning for agricultural researchers demonstrating best practice of Australian agricultural science knowledge. In 2022-23, we will continue to strengthen the platform, incorporating lessons learned from the pilot courses and working with the research program and Alumni to develop relevant and engaging content for users continued professional development.



The first cohort of the Meryl Williams Fellowship graduated in November 2022, in Brisbane. The fellows are pictured with ACIAR General Manager, Outreach and Capacity Building, Eleanor Dean (centre back, in pink), and fellowship facilitators from the University of New England, Dr Rebecca Spence and Dr Philip Harrell. Photo: Patrick Cape.

Organisational capacity building

ACIAR has long-term relationships with overseas agricultural research organisations. The ongoing nature of our research partnerships makes it important to understand the enablers, constraints and impacts that capacity building has on strengthening institutions. Under our organisational capacity-building research, we are identifying approaches that have been successful in enhancing our research partners' organisational effectiveness for improved agricultural research. This body of work is informing new approaches to enhance institutional awareness in research projects for more effective and sustainable research outcomes. In 2022-23 we will continue to work with a select number of partner organisations and develop shared pathways and approaches to supporting increased organisational effectiveness.

Other training activities

ACIAR supports training activities delivered by the Crawford Fund. This includes the Master Class and Training Program, a new program of e-mentoring linking agricultural researchers from developing countries with mentors in Australia, and the Next-Gen suite of activities designed to build interest in careers in international agricultural research.

Director, Capacity Building

Ms Kate Turner-Mann

See page 185 for contact details.

Table 6.1 Participation in ACIAR capacity-building programs

Programs	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 (est)
John Allwright Fellowship						
No. active in year	97	85	75	70	37	37
No. awarded in year	7	12	10	10	No round	12
John Dillon Fellowship						
No. active in year	10	28	28	20	15	36
Meryl Williams Fellowship						
No. active in year	-	-	20	40	40	23
Pacific Scholarships						
No. active in year	13	10	10	23	23	29
No. awarded in year	6	6	3	14	11	To be awarded
Alumni engagement						
No. participants	-	75	90	140	180	120
Launch fund						
No. events supported	-	11	15	11	8	4