

**In the field:** Delia Catacutan (far right), a John Allwright fellow involved in an ACIAR project extending Landcare in the Philippines, addresses a group of farmers during a training session in Lantapan, on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao. Delia, like many fellows, divides her time between studies in Australia (at the University of Queensland) and field work at home.

PHOTO: ACIAR PHILIPPINES-AUSTRALIA LANDCARE PROJECT



IN SCIENCE,  
AS IN MANY  
FIELDS,  
PRACTITIONERS  
IN DEVELOPED  
COUNTRIES  
ARE WORLD  
LEADERS.  
AGRICULTURAL  
SCIENCE IS NO  
DIFFERENT.

# BUILDING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

**H**ow do scientists in developing countries, often lacking resources and good English skills, tap into the expertise in developed countries and apply it at home? ACIAR 'transfers' science through project partnerships that involve agricultural scientists from Australia working closely with developing country partners, often in very specific and limited areas. Despite this project focus, broader capacity building is also needed.

ACIAR has, since 1986, offered young agricultural scientists from developing countries the opportunity to undertake higher degree study in Australia, through the John Allwright Fellowship scheme. Not only do these scientists, who are or have recently been involved in an ACIAR project, gain valuable scientific skills, they also get a thorough grounding in English and begin to build valuable networks amongst their peers.

Best of all, the majority return home to pass their expertise on to others, many going on to take up leading roles in key institutions and in the agricultural science community of their countries. To gauge the value of the fellowship scheme, ACIAR undertook a survey of past fellows, the results of which are reported on the next page.

Since its inception, 109 students from 19 countries throughout the Pacific, Asia and Africa have graduated with higher honours, and almost three-quarters are currently employed in their home country working in agricultural science. There are 50 fellows currently at Australian institutions undertaking postgraduate studies. Lilly Sar is one such fel-

low, undertaking PhD studies into the elements of successful communication of research results in Australia and Papua New Guinea (see page 13).

The success of the John Allwright Fellowship Scheme encouraged ACIAR in establishing the John Dillon Memorial Fellowships, which help outstanding young agricultural scientists visit Australian institutions and develop leadership skills in the areas of agricultural research management, agricultural policy and/or extension technologies. Fellows gain exposure to Australian agriculture across a range of best-practice organisations involved in research, extension and/or policy making.

The visit programs are tailored by negotiation between ACIAR, the selected fellow and an Australian host institution to meet the needs of individual fellows and their employing organisation.

Now in its third year, the John Dillon Fellowships have seen seven emerging leaders travel to Australia to learn more about leadership, build networks and develop management skills. A further six will come to Australia early in 2005.

ACIAR's support for training also covers both project-specific activities (delivered through individual projects) and support for training courses on specific issues. A small number of projects have also been undertaken with the aim of building institutional capacity, such as the rehabilitation of the Agriculture Faculty at the University of East Timor, fostering science communication in Papua New Guinea (see page 12) and support for the Cambodian Agricultural Research Fund.

# THE VALUE OF A FELLOWSHIP

HOW CAN THE VALUE OF A FELLOWSHIP PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A DEVELOPING-COUNTRY SCIENTIST TO STUDY IN AUSTRALIA BE MEASURED? **WARREN PAGE**

**A**ssessing the value of postgraduate study in technological areas has relied mainly on surveying outcomes. Economic returns especially are very difficult to accurately quantify, but perhaps the most telling measure of any such scheme is the stories of those involved.

In 2004 ACIAR embarked on an outcomes survey of the John Allwright Fellowship Scheme, interviewing fellows who had successfully attained post-graduate qualification or degrees through a fellowship.

Of the 109 graduates, 84 were able to be contacted – six of whom are now living in developed countries. The remainder are living and working in their home country, with 80 percent still working at the institutions where they first became involved in ACIAR projects. (All fellows were, or had recently been, involved in an ACIAR project at the time they undertook the fellowship.)

Mr Lauatu Tautea, of Papua New Guinea, completed his Masters of Economics in 1992, studying through the University of New England. Speaking about the fellowship Mr Tautea says it “has meant my life to me. It has changed my life and opened up the world to me as I have also travelled the world.”

When he returned to PNG after his fellowship Mr Tautea, then an economist at the Cocoa Board based at Rabaul, remained with the Board. Today he is its Chief Executive Officer. “The fellowship provided me with the confidence to perform professionally, and has given me a strong analytic outlook on life and appreciation of issues affecting society.”

His influence on the Board by adding a market economics emphasis to planning, and now formulating an economic assessment of smallholder cocoa production in PNG, was in part shaped through his learning during his fellowship.

While many of the 84 former fellows interviewed have not achieved such a meteoric rise, more than three-quarters have been promoted since returning home. Of this group, 80 percent considered this promotion to be the result of knowledge and skills gained while studying in Australia under a fellowship.

Of the 84 fellows interviewed, 82 said that they had also passed on skills and knowledge to colleagues in their work and beyond, through opportunities that arose in the course of their employment and in some cases with educational institutions.

And it is not just the fellows themselves who said this. The directors of 64 institutions in 16 countries that employ former fellows also were interviewed in the survey. Ninety-six percent of directors agreed that fellows had passed on knowledge and skills.



## Dr Yothin Konboon

“Having finished my PhD internationally gives myself and my family pride,” says Dr Yothin Konboon, of Thailand’s Rice Research Institute.

Yothin completed a PhD in soil science in 1999, and is now using his experience to benefit rice farmers in Thailand and Laos. He does this in part through frequent attendance at training courses for Thai and Lao agronomists on nutrient management in rainfed agriculture.

A weekly forum among researchers to exchange ideas and information on projects relevant to agronomic practices that will benefit Thai and Lao farmers, partly inspired through experiences working with supervisors and friends during his time at the University of New England, also helps deliver benefits.

Yothin’s desire to deliver benefits to others using experience gained during his fellowship reflects the personal benefits a fellowship has provided him. One is “having many new friends in a great country” (Australia), many of whom are involved in agricultural and other scientific fields. Another is the opportunities that being more fluent in English, science’s international language, provides.

“The fellowship has helped me gain new knowledge from international journals and articles and to work with international organisations. I am able to work more efficiently and with more confidence.”

An internationally respected qualification from an Australian university also reveals another, less obvious benefit; the value of recognition for scientists like Yothin. “Through my PhD I gain more respect in my career from colleagues.”

## Tran Hanh

Dr Tran Xuan Hanh of the National Veterinary Company (NAVETCO) in Vietnam completed his PhD in 2003. Here he tells his story.

“I got the fellowship in 1998 and studied for four years at the University of Queensland in Australia. This was an important event for my life.

“Studying in Australia was a good chance for me to get a high degree of education what I have wished for and of more importance is that I have had more relationships with people coming from different countries in the world.

“During staying there I had received much help from my supervisors, Australian friends and others both in studying and life. This encouraged me to fulfil my PhD program. I had learnt things from them.

“It is really said that with getting this fellowship I had a great opportunity to access more scientific information, modern techniques on bacteriology what is being applied effectively in my works at NAVETCO.

“Presently, I am a Deputy Director of NAVETCO and Director of Veterinary Research Centre (VRC) so the experiences and the knowledge gained is not only useful for my research work, but also is useful in the management work.

“The studies on diseases of animals and poultry and vaccine development that I have been conducting at NAVETCO are continued works and extension of these works from my PhD program at UQ.”



The main avenues through which this occurs are staff and student training, seminars, workshops and through supervising and lecturing at educational institutions.

With the aim of the John Allwright Fellowship scheme being capacity building in partner countries, the results of the survey are very positive.

At the very least, they confirm that two of the main objectives of ACIAR's fellowships are being met: the majority of fellows are still actively involved in research in their home countries and most of these are increasing the expertise of fellow staff members at their institutions. These institutions play a vital role in delivering the outcomes of ACIAR-supported research to smallholder farmers throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

### Norah Omot

Norah Omot of PNG's National Agricultural Research Institute has a very concise answer when asked if she would recommend a John Allwright Fellowship to other researchers – “definitely”.

Having gained a Masters of Agricultural Economics in 2002, Norah returned home to Lae, where she worked as a junior economist. The skills and knowledge gained from her degree have opened up a range of opportunities, and helps to explain her willingness to recommend the scheme to others. “After completing the fellowship, I was promoted to a more challenging position as Senior Economist. The fellowship enabled me to develop a challenging and interesting career, which would not have been possible, otherwise.”

The latest of these is leading the International Food Policy Research Institute's activity survey on research and development indicators in Papua New Guinea.

Norah was also recently awarded an ACIAR John Dillon Fellowship, and will return to Australia early in 2005 to visit relevant Australian institutions to further develop her leadership and management skills.

**“It has changed my life”:**  
fellow Mr Lauatu Tautea of  
Papua New Guinea.

