

## Developing a dream

*'...to work for the people behind the plough'*

Stories of the backgrounds, motivations and goals of the 2013  
ACIAR John Allwright Fellows



## Contents

Foreword	3
The John Allwright Fellows, September 2013	4
Scene from ACIAR project fieldwork	5
Abir Rahman's story – <i>It's not a dream</i>	6
Ahmad – <i>A personal story</i>	7
Ahmed's story – <i>Journey to fellowship</i>	8
Anne's story – <i>A dream becomes true</i>	10
Audrey's story – <i>Rays of hope</i>	11
Bayu's story – <i>Working for smallholder farmers</i>	12
Char – <i>A biographical story</i>	13
Faye's story – <i>Family life and professional responsibility</i>	14
Frank's story – <i>From rural village Laos to Sydney, Australia: A dream journey</i>	15
Iben's story – <i>Sharing experiences and knowledge</i>	16
Jen's story – <i>An extraordinary effort to fulfill one's dream</i>	17
Junior's story – <i>'An accidental agricultural researcher'</i>	18
Micah's story – <i>Great things from humble beginnings</i>	19
Minh's story – <i>Life is changing with ACIAR's aid</i>	20
<i>Of Cane Toads and fish farms – A story from Fiji</i>	22
<i>'Nugie is a scientist. We don't need scientists.'</i>	23
Sami's story – <i>Personal and professional life of an ACIAR JAF</i>	25
Supre's story – <i>Creating a better world for everyone through agriculture</i>	26
Tho's story – <i>A dream never ends...</i>	28
Vee's story – <i>How Vee became an agronomist</i>	30
List of contributors	32

## Foreword

At the September 2013 ACIAR meeting of the ACIAR John Allwright Fellows, an interesting topic repeatedly came up in discussion. Many of the Fellows wanted to say how delighted, and surprised, they were to meet each other and the ACIAR staff. They had not anticipated the richness of learning about the work and the lives of their colleagues in other ACIAR projects, and had not previously realised how central ACIAR's role is in facilitating an international community of agricultural researchers with very similar values and goals across the developing world. The importance of the relationships and networks that flow from this community was becoming more and more apparent to them.

As a result, in order that these Fellows could learn more about their counterparts in other projects, it was suggested that they might share some of their life stories with each other and with ACIAR. All had become committed agricultural researchers with many motivations in common, yet their journeys to the 'fellowship' that brought them together were often very complex and different. Geographical and social context, childhood, life events, successes and failures along the way, are all part of a JAF 'story', and these are often unseen beneath the tip of the iceberg that represents an individual's professional work.

The theme 'Developing a dream' was decided upon for a short piece of writing in which these international researchers reflect on the journeys that have brought them to the goals they hold today. We suggested writing in the third person, as it has been pointed out in some life writing scholarship that this a fruitful strategy for promoting reflection, and we opened the option of using a pseudonym if the writer wished. Some small-scale editing of English grammar was requested and agreed upon.

As presenters in ACIAR JAF workshop meetings, we have enormously valued meeting ACIAR students and staff, both in person and in writing, and we sincerely thank the 2013 Fellows for bringing these narratives to the community. We trust you will all enjoy the reflective stories collected here as an added dimension to understandings about how agricultural research grows, and to the collegiate relationships that ACIAR makes possible.

Kate Cadman and Margaret Cargill

October 2013

## The ACIAR John Allwright Fellows

September 2013



## Scene from an ACIAR project in the field



*With thanks to Monal Lal*

## Abir Rahman's story – *It's not a dream*

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Abir couldn't believe it is his village – his ideas are working, and all the happy faces around him. This is the harvest season of Aman paddy; they are making preparation to do the Nabnno festival, a harvest celebration usually celebrated with food and dance and music. Families are very happy as they have got a good yield this year, as well as their investment being lower compared to the farmers of the adjacent villages. Two years ago they formed a community group; members of the group were strongly committed to solve their problems with their collective abilities. They saved their surplus money collectively and this year they bought some agriculture machineries that they have been using according to the members needs. They have introduced a gas based irrigation system that needed primary capital but it reduced their irrigation cost to half. They are practising vermin compost in their house, so now they do not buy any fertilizer for their homestead gardening. They are making fisheries in their ponds and rearing poultry and cattle in their houses. They are planning how they can go to the city market collectively with their products, thus they can get good prices for them. A debate is going on about what would be the most efficient way – Abir is just enjoying the debate...

"Abir! Abir! Wake up! It is time to go to the seminar," said James.

"Oh man, I was in my dream," thought Abir.

Abir was lying under the tree outside their school in the University of Queensland. Before sleeping he was thinking about his childhood when he went to primary school and sat under the mango tree. It was not that he and his classmates were under the mango tree for playing. They didn't have enough classrooms for all the classes; as a result the Class One students brought mats from their homes for sitting under the mango tree. His best friend had left school as he didn't have good clothes that he could wear in school. Every year Abir got the old books from his elder brother, but the scent of new books was amazing. A set of new books was his dream, a wish that would never be fulfilled. Now he is here under the scholarship of ACIAR for doing his PhD. He knows he will get a good job when he goes back his country, but the dream will have to come true so all the future Abirs' parents can send their children to the school with new clothes and new books.



## Ahmad – A personal story

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Ahmad belongs to a middle class family settled in a major city of Pakistan. His parents had only one son and a daughter and his father by profession was a college professor. After his higher secondary school education in the local institutions, Ahmad joined a lead agriculture university of his country located in his own city. Since he was a hardworking student, he completed his B.Sc. (Hons) and M.Sc. (Hons) in Agricultural Economics with distinction. Soon after completion of his studies, he got the opportunity of a lectureship in his faculty. He joined the university as a lecturer despite having two more job options, that is, in a bank and in a development organisation.

Since he had a strong passion for teaching, Ahmad worked diligently in his department against all the odds expected in a developing country context. He had a strong desire to do a doctorate in his subject so that he could serve, with enhanced abilities and professional skills, his university and his country. However, due to the internal politics of his department, he could not fulfil his dream. Then, he decided to go abroad to achieve his goal and at his first attempt he won a scholarship, for a major European country university from the Higher Education Commission of his country. Meanwhile, he had got married and had a son. He went abroad but within a few days of his departure his mother died. He had to come back home as his family was in crisis, and he gave up the scholarship.

Ahmad again joined his university and started keeping himself busy. However, his professional career had halted which sometimes was quite discouraging and de-motivating for him. Time went on and after few years, his university recommended him for an ACIAR scholarship to do a PhD. Unwillingly, on the advice of a few friends and family members, he forwarded his documents with the thought in his mind that his application would not be a success, and furthermore his family circumstances would not allow him to proceed abroad. But this time perhaps fortune was in his favour. ACIAR awarded him a John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) scholarship for PhD study and facilitated a lot all the processes of admission and visa. His family members also encouraged and supported him to take this great chance. Reluctantly at first, he availed himself of this opportunity. Initially, he came alone to Australia and later on his wife and two sons also joined him.

Now Ahmad is living happily with his family in Australia. He is in the last phase of his PhD and his children are going to a primary school. Hopefully, he will return to his home country next year. Sometimes he thinks how ACIAR has changed his life. He is getting an education, professional skills and exposure to research, which were virtually impossible in Pakistan. His children are getting an education which is perhaps a dream in Pakistan. These things are now rebuilding him and gradually he is regaining his lost confidence. He thinks that upon completion of his PhD, he will be in a position to play an active and vibrant role in the teaching and research activities of his university.

## Ahmed's story – *Journey to fellowship*

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This ACIAR Fellow is Ahmed and this is his story.

Ahmed was born in a rural village of Bangladesh in a Muslim family. His father was a physician and he had an agricultural farm as well. Father would work in a government sub-centre health complex, go to hospital in the morning and would go back home from his practice chambers sometime in the middle of the night. They had some permanent waged workers to maintain the farm. His mother was a homemaker but very conscious about the children's education. They are five brothers and four sisters. When Ahmed was a primary school student, one of his brothers had graduated from university, one was a student of a medical college, one was a student of an engineering college, and all his sisters had got married. His parents always inspired him for education. Father would say, "I would even sell my blood if it needs money to bear the cost of your education." However, most of the households of the village were farming families; most elderly people in the village were illiterate and less educated.

When Ahmed was a primary school student, he had a mixed concept about the level of difficulties to complete high school (that is, 10 years of schooling) and college (that is, 2 years of schooling after completing high school) education. This was because two of his elder brothers had got first division and two got second division in the final exams of high school (Secondary School Certificate) and college (Higher Secondary Certificate). However, most other students of the village could not even pass the school level final exam.

In this context, after completing primary school, Ahmed went to study in a sub-district high school and then in a government college at district headquarters. His parents wished that he would be a doctor but he missed the opportunity to be admitted into medical college because of less than half a mark in his score, including the admission test and the academic score. Then his doctor brother asked him to sit for the admission test to the Bangladesh Agricultural University, not to study there but just to visit the uni campus. Then he was still bearing the dream to be a human doctor; he went to the cinema hall to watch a movie even the night before the admission test day, but he got the opportunity for admission to the renowned Agriculture University of Bangladesh.

After Ahmed's admission to the Bangladesh Agricultural University, when he was working on preparation for sitting the medical college admission test for the second time, his mother was diagnosed as a cancer patient in the advanced stage, and finally the medical sciences were in vain to cure his mother's cancer. In this respect, although his mum was very worried about his medical admission up until the day the cancer made her speechless, Ahmed could not manage to sit for the medical admission test again in the following year because he was really traumatized after the departure of his great mum..., he says 'great mum' because she was a role model to him. He continued to study Agriculture but he was under trauma after losing his mum up until the third year.



After being admitted to the Bangladesh Agricultural University, he had to fill out some forms. In one of the forms there was an option for career choice. Although he did not have much idea about the criteria and constraints of the Agricultural Scientist job, he knew that this job is corruption free and there is some opportunity to work for the people behind the plough. He had been given the chance to be an agricultural scientist. In brief, this was the pathway for him to be an agricultural scientist but he had to go through a lot more arduous paths as well.

ACIAR has become a role model organization for Ahmed. He thinks it is a very complete organization because of its diversified mandates. In fact, ACIAR is not only working to change present circumstances but also relentlessly striving for sustainable development all over the world. In Ahmed's view, the JAF programme is a most important driver to develop human resources for developing countries to achieve the sustainable goals of each country. He did not know much about the mandates of such a great organization before commencing work with some CSIRO scientists through an ACIAR project in 2006. Importantly, then he noticed a fundamental difference in the working style between ACIAR scientists and other country scientists. The ACIAR scientist gave him full autonomy to work independently (for example, developing questionnaires for data collection, data entry, analysis, writing a report and article) but other project scientists often send out the questionnaires for collecting data and requiring them to be sent them back after entry in their preferred software. In this respect, working with ACIAR developed his skills and boosted up his confidence to work at international level.

It was in 2006 that one of the CSIRO scientists asked Ahmed, "Would you like to pursue PhD study in Australia?" In fact, he had mixed conceptions about the success rate of PhD study in Australia because during the period from 1980-1990 a couple of his teachers had got PhDs and a couple could not finish their PhDs in Australia. However, without any hesitation he replied, "I do and I must be very grateful to you for creating the prospect for me." But he had to wait about four more years to get this fine prospect for changing his career due to various unfavourable circumstances. Anyway, even today Ahmed does not know the appropriate word to express his gratitude to ACIAR and the CSIRO scientists – the only word he can say is that JAF is a lifetime opportunity for him. Finally, he thinks it is his destiny, because he knows how curved and difficult the tunnel is from the Chandipur Primary School to PhD study at the University of Queensland.

Recently, during the one week JAF meeting, Ahmed has met with his JAF fellows. He thinks all of the JAF awardees are very diligent, meritorious and highly competent to serve their respective nations after their post graduate studies in Australia. He does believe most of them will be leaders in their respective research fields and will serve their nation up to their level best.

## *Anne's story – A dream becomes true*

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When Anne studied bachelor at university, she wanted to get a job in the R&D department of a famous international company so she could make many new products for consumers. She didn't think that she would become a scientist working in the agricultural area. However, something changed for her after graduation. During a trip to a rural area in her country with her supervisors and her group, she recognized that farmers are very poor in spite of their endless hard working. Deep in her heart, she hoped she could do something to support them to overcome their difficulties.

After her graduation, Anne got the job in the multinational corporation. However, she kept thinking about the dream that would bring happiness to the farmers. Therefore, she decided to start a new journey. Now she works as a scientist in a research institution. In this institution, she has been fortunate to work on projects to improve returns to our farmers by enhancing the quality of fruit postharvest. She has learnt a lot from the junior researchers in these projects and gained insight into the high quality of science overseas.

Anne became keen to study abroad to build her science knowledge and learn the latest research approaches and techniques. She would use this new knowledge to help improve the research capability of her institute and to assist the poor farmers. Her dream became true when she received the John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) award from ACIAR. Now she is very happy that she is gaining new knowledge from studying in Australia. She hopes she will use the new science knowledge and skills gained to train other researchers and the new generation of scientists in her own and other organisations to help increase the science quality and capability in her country. In the future, she wishes to lead projects to improve productivity and economic returns to the agricultural sector and to the country.

## Audrey's story – Rays of hope

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Audrey was born to a large family. Her father died when she was hardly one year old. Her mother took the role of the head of the family looking after five children of her own and several others in the extended family. By the time Audrey was two years old, tragedy hit the family again as two of her maternal uncles became the victims of the political upheaval at that time. Within a short time, the family almost hit poverty as the uncles' wives skilfully took most of the family's properties, while her mother was still trying to come to terms with losing her husband and brothers. Only parts of the family farm remained, the others were all gone.

The family faced lot of hardships over the years but the land still remained – keeping the family together. This was perhaps the most important thing that Audrey learnt in her early years.

Audrey's mother always believed that girls should attend school. This was not received very well in the community, especially when there was only one daughter in the family. To her mother's delight Audrey made it all the way through high school to the University. She pursued agricultural science even though it meant leaving home for four years and living in another country.

Audrey enjoyed (and still does) working with the farmers in the fields, but bureaucratic systems and approaches kept her mostly away from these activities. She felt wasted attending meetings, workshops, and drafting letters for her boss, doing the things that the big bosses demanded. This went on for too long. She wanted to focus on issues that would help address the problems at the farmers' level, not just on writing recommendations from books. However, this was not happening with the limited resources and facilities.

For Audrey, the Australian Centre for International Research (ACIAR) came not only as the resource to pursue a degree but as the hope that she would still be able to do one thing for the farmers. This can seem a little too trivial when everything is weighed against the bigger picture of global impacts these days. Audrey seriously hopes that ACIAR still continues to keep the human factor in its own picture. The recent JAF week was an excellent opportunity to learn about studies conducted in other countries. More importantly, it gave an insight into those countries and their people.

## Bayu's story – Working for smallholder farmers

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When Bayu was young, he lived in rural areas where agriculture was the main occupation of the villagers, including his father. To generate income from another sector, his father started a business cultivating cat fish in three big ponds. Bayu was worried because growing fish was not his father's expertise. As a consequence, the first crop was successful to be harvested but the following crops were not, and his father experienced lost profits enormously.

Based on his childhood experiences, Bayu decided to pursue study at the University of Fishery in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. His first professional research experience was begun in the Lombok Aquaculture Development Centre, where he commenced his first career as a member of the aquaculture engineering staff in 1998, soon after graduating from the Fishery University. He worked in breeding, growing marine finfish and non-fish, such as groupers, barramundi, seaweeds and abalone. In addition, he had the duty of disseminating the grow-out techniques to smallholder farmers by creating demonstration farms and giving on-the-job training in the selected areas. Today he thinks that extension and dissemination are the major critical constraints in supporting successful farmers. This opinion was influenced by his father's business failure experiences in cultivating fish when he was young.

In 2006, Bayu attended a SADI (Smallholder Agribusiness Development Initiative) held by ACIAR in Mataram. ACIAR's technical cooperation has supported his career in providing dissemination to smallholder farmers to help them to cope with their crops' problems. ACIAR granted a scholarship to Bayu to pursue a higher degree in the University of NSW, Australia. As an international student where English is not his first language, Bayu found that academic life in Australia is challenging. However, this was anticipated by ACIAR, which conducts a pre-departure special course for students.

Now, in my own voice outside my story I want to say that having the opportunity to study abroad is one of the best parts of my life. It allows me to meet new colleagues and built international relationships. My interaction with agriculture researchers from other developing countries has assisted me to make more sense of theories that I have learned. The recent JAF week meeting held by ACIAR in Canberra, for example, has allowed me to better understand how research and development can be implemented in an economically and socially challenging environment such as in my country, Indonesia.

When I return to my home country, I will implement my skills and knowledge that I have gained during my candidature in Australia to develop the Indonesian marine aquaculture industry, which is village-based and owned by villagers, by providing better extensions for aqua-farmers to improve their productivity and income.

## Char – A biographical story

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Char was born and brought up in a small rural town by a single mum. The community that he has grown up in were mainly engaged in petty trade and agriculture. The town did not have basic infrastructure facilities. In the community in which he grew up, it was thought that education is the only avenue to lead a better life. This has significantly impacted the way he values education, and starting from elementary school his academic performance was consistently very good.

Although Char's initial interest was to study engineering, he was placed in an agricultural university and ended up studying agricultural economics. However, through time he has developed a strong interest in agriculture and he completed his undergraduate study with a very good cumulative grade point average. Consequently, he was subsequently recruited by the same university as a Graduate Assistant. Having served as a Graduate Assistant for two years, he pursued his MSc study in the same university and completed it in 2010. In the same year, he won both AusAID and John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) scholarships but he chose the JAF one as it allows three field trips back to home country.

Although as a university staff member Char was likely to pursue PhD study, he had never thought that he would get this opportunity within one year of completing his MSc study. The JAF scholarship opened a remarkable opportunity for him to study in an international university, which will help him to realize his potentials and achieve his dreams. The recent scientific training workshop helped him to refresh the principles of scientific training, to receive individual feedback and to meet the JAF staff and other fellows.

## *Faye's story – Family life and professional responsibility*

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I love the beach and love the 30-45 minute boat rides from town to my island village most Fridays after school. Those weekends spent in the village were always full of fun, and that was one of my favourite childhood memories. My first eleven years influenced me in more ways than I had first imagined. It was a pretty simple but yet enriched life, well balanced and grounded.

I grew up travelling everywhere around the country from North to South, from small towns to cities due to my father's profession, for this was the start of my passion for travelling. Years later when my family moved on and away from where I grew up, I carried on those values which still now mould out my life. And when I was at the crux of my life when I was 21 years old, those life skills became the founding path of my personal and professional life.

My father was a professional in the field of forestry and my mother, apart from holding a full time motherly position to four girls and two boys, she still does a lot of volunteering work. It's been nine years now since my father passed away, and the greatest gift he did for my family and me was allowing us the opportunity to spend time with family and real people in the village during our early upbringing. For I was often told that there are many ways to fish in the village, and so this guided me not to view the world in a single straight line.

I was doing my third year undergraduate degree when my father passed away, and one and half years later I was blessed with my first job with a good institution. The first four years of my professional life were an experience I still hold dear to my soul, to look after my four younger siblings who were all in school, and my widowed mother. My elder sister at that time was married and had two kids and lived in the city. I became the head of my household, and had to make decisions and choices regarding not only my life but my family's as well, which now influences the leadership qualities in my professional life.

I am now a thirty-year-old single female. I love travelling, and I have equally inspiring younger siblings and a widow mother who is actively doing volunteer work with rural women. I am also an aunt and cherish my divine role as an adopting mother.



## Frank's story – From rural village Laos to Sydney, Australia: A dream journey

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Frank spent most of his child life in a village of Savannakhet province, central Laos. After school he would help his grandfather taking care of the family's buffalo and cattle, setting the fire to warm them at night time, and bringing rice straw for his favourite buffalo. Every dry season in his village, there were one or two cases of disease outbreak that caused a huge impact on the farmers, including his grandfather. He did not understand how that could be at the time but he wanted to learn more about diseases to help his grandfather in the future.

Frank excelled in his studies at his high school and agriculture college where he learned more about cattle and buffalo diseases and production. He learned that the endemic diseases hammering his village every year are in fact foot and mouth disease (FMD) and haemorrhagic septicaemia (HS). Frank started his young career in livestock extension in a development project in northern Laos where he learned to develop social skills and extension skill. Through the project work, FMD and HS vaccination programmes were being promoted. However, deep down he just thought that the endemic causes of those important diseases are not just about a failure of vaccination programmes but perhaps failure of biosecurity practices and extension. "We might not be working hard enough to improve farmer knowledge," he was thinking.

A few years passed by. Frank had gained a bit of experience and seen the world in a bigger picture as FMD and HS are not only his village's problem but regional problems threatening food security and poverty. Throughout those years, Frank had attended a few workshops and conferences where ideas and experience of disease control had been discussed. At one conference Frank had met a very important person in his life, and they had a lengthy discussion about disease control, poverty and food insecurities in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The person he met happened to be an expert in ruminant health and production, running an ACIAR project on cattle. He said to Frank, "Hey! Frank, you have ideas and dreams to help farmers grappling with FMD and HS and poverty and food security. Had you thought about doing more studies on that? Have you heard that ACIAR could provide a PhD scholarship on this issue? But you would have to work on your English, and the results of the application would be based on merit."

Frank had kept working on his skills and he attempted to apply for an ACIAR John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) scholarship. On his way to a field trip he received a text of congratulation on his application result from his future supervisor. It was just a wonderful day.

In the past two years as a JAF scholar, when he looks back, Frank sees he has come a long way from where he was. Although it was still a long way to go to build his dream for the world of poverty and FMD, at least now he was part of a prestigious JAF development and research organization such as ACIAR. He talked to himself: Dreams can only stay dreams, if we do nothing about it. Without an ACIAR JAF scholarship and the support and encouragement from his supervisor, he would not be here in Sydney, Australia.

## Iben's story – *Sharing experiences and knowledge*

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Iben was born in small village called Boti in South Central Timor, 6 hours by bus from Kupang – West Timor, the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. He spent most of his childhood in Boti. His parents worked as farmers. As a son, he had to help his parents to look after their livestock, to cultivate and grow corn plants, potatoes, cassava, bananas, and so on (as dry land cropping and only in the wet season) to fulfil their basic needs. Based on reality, as he was living in a very poor family where everything was economically difficult, this situation made him think and decide to change his life, at least to get a better education. After finishing his elementary school, he moved to Kupang to continue his studies from junior high school to university. Life was so tough for Iben when he was studying. He had to manage his time wisely, between studying and working to meet his needs, especially tuition fees and life expenses.

Fortunately, two years after he graduated from university, from 2006 to 2010 Iben was involved in an ACIAR project as a junior scientist. This project was led by Dr. Richard Copland from the University of Queensland and Dr. Gusti Jelantik from Undana Kupang. The main focus of this project was basically to find strategies to reduce cow-calves' mortality in West Timor. Iben had a fantastic job as a junior scientist by meeting and discussing with farmers, setting up farmers' groups in several villages in three different districts (Kupang, South Central Timor and North Central Timor), preparing raw materials for animal feeding, including milling, mixing, and distributing cow-calves' food to each farmer. This project gave a great opportunity to Iben to learn new experiences such as working with the farmers. Still no dreams ever appeared or came into Iben's mind to study overseas. However, in 2008, he was accepted as a lecturer at Nusa Cendana University in Undana. By this time, Dr Richard Copland and Dr. Gusti Jelantik had a thought to give Iben the chance to apply for a John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) as their two fellows' junior scientists had previously studied overseas (one as a JAF in James Cook University and the other one through the Ford Foundation in the Netherlands). Fortunately, Iben's JAF application was approved by ACIAR to study at James Cook University in Australia.

Today Iben is still concerned to do more research on agriculture especially related to animals, in particular cattle, in order to help farmers in West Timor to improve their standard of life. For this ACIAR has played an important role by facilitating all JAF awarded fellows to meet for one week in Canberra. This moment was important for all the JAF awardees to know each other, and especially to meet with ACIAR staff. Moreover, the most important thing was to share experiences and knowledge, both from the lecturers or from other fellows. Iben has gained lots of experiences and information during this meeting, which will help him to improve his knowledge and fulfil his dream as an agricultural researcher. Another very important thing is that through this meeting, ACIAR has also provided a link between each JAF fellow from different countries, which will continue to be beneficial for sharing information and experiences related to the updating of research.

## Jen's story – An extraordinary effort to fulfil one's dream

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Jen grew up in an enterprise-oriented family that buys and sells agricultural products like rice grains, copra, vegetables, and grocery items. During her childhood years, she used to accompany her grandmother on the street selling food delicacies that were prepared by her mother. And when Jen was growing older, she used to tend their small business in the wet market every day after school, on weekends, and every semester break. In some way, that routine motivated her to dream of a good career and hence, she's always been competitive in school. Moreover, Jen's acquired entrepreneurial skill from her late mother greatly helped to finance her degree when their business had slowed down. She basically dreamt to become a successful civil engineer but financial constraints hindered her from achieving that. Instead, Jen was enrolled in an agricultural university and took up a degree in Agricultural Engineering.

Yet, during her first semester, Jen was strongly encouraged and inspired by her course lecturer in economics and she got good grades. She then shifted her degree to Agriculture, and Agricultural Economics became her chosen field of study. She believed that her degree would most likely be compatible with her entrepreneurial skill but it was also an interesting challenge for her since she could apply her knowledge on their agricultural farms. Thus, she had a very strong interest to achieve this but she also looked forward to gain a job related to research after her graduation. Then a big opportunity came after she passed the licensure board examination and landed her first job in a short-term research project in their department. Gradually, through the years, with hard work and perseverance, she was involved in several different research projects, including ACIAR funded projects.

Jen's experience in research, together with the great influence of her thesis supervisor as well as her colleagues, strongly motivated her to pursue her career further, thus she obtained a JAF scholarship from ACIAR. Now, she sees how the JAF workshop has broadened her horizons through meeting her fellow colleagues, extending her network of friends and considering possible future collaborations with them. Furthermore, Jen strongly believes that ACIAR plays a key role in development, not only providing significant research opportunities but also for realizing her future career through their scholarship assistance. This will further develop and enhance her skills, which might be very useful in her future dealings. She affirms that ACIAR is an instrument of change by moulding her capability in research and opening up possible future collaborations; this would lead to a very positive impact and a highly viable tool for the greater good of society.

## Junior's story – *'An accidental agricultural researcher'*

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Junior is an accidental agricultural researcher and he never imagined before that he would become one. It was what might be called fate, or just a series of random events, that led him to where he is now. Junior grew up and gained consciousness in a family that is no longer involved in agriculture. His father, who used to be a farmer during his early years, worked in the mining industry. His mother was a pharmacist by profession but chose to become a full time homemaker. His sister likes studying literature but has more passion for baking and making pastries. Looking back at his life, Junior's journey to become an agricultural researcher came when he took a bachelor's degree in Community Development. It was there that he experienced being immersed in the grassroots sectors of farmers, fisher folk, indigenous communities, and the urban poor. These experiences gave him an appreciation of doing development work. A few years after graduation, he started working for a university as a research assistant in an ACIAR funded research project. It was during that time that he had greater experience working with marginalised farmers, and he had the realisation that he could contribute to the improvement of the lives of other people, even in a little way, through agricultural research.

During the recent 2013 JAF week, Junior valued what he learned in the scientific writing workshop as it has improved his skills in writing and making presentations. But apart from that, meeting other JAFs who share the same interest and passion is also another great importance of this meeting. It has reaffirmed his passion for development work as he has been able to connect with people doing the same thing from other parts of the region. It provides an avenue to share experiences, both personal and professional.

ACIAR is instrumental in making Junior's dream of being able to contribute to society by helping marginalised groups real, by providing him with this opportunity of undertaking postgraduate studies. The opportunity of having such experience is limited, especially in developing countries.

## Micah's story – *Great things from humble beginnings*

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Micah comes from a poor, happy family of rice farmers in one of the countries of South East Asia. As rice farming is the sole source of income in the family, he, together with his other siblings, helped his father cultivating paddy rice from his very early childhood until he finished a degree. His parents strove very hard just to be able to send all five of their children to school, as they didn't want them to be like themselves who were not able to finish a degree. Their parents stressed and kept reminding them to study hard and be good in the studies, as they didn't have wealth to pass on to them and they believed that the only treasure they could offer is by supporting them to finish a degree to the best of their ability. Providentially, all of them were successful and finished a degree from a university. Micah was very grateful to his parents for their efforts and for providing all kinds of assistance.

Micah has since completed a baccalaureate degree in Agriculture in one of the leading universities in his home country. Subsequently, he worked uncomplainingly at the same University in one of its research projects for more than six years with a relatively small wage due to the limited project budget. While working on this project, he had the chance to gradually acquire postgraduate units leading to a Master of Science degree at the same university, and he eventually completed it after five years. After the project terminated, Micah was then employed on a new project in the same university, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). His enthusiasm and dedication in working on this project paid off as his project leaders both in his home country and Australia recommended him to apply for the John Allwright Fellowship (JAF), a very generous scholarship offered by ACIAR to allow staff from a partner developing country to study a postgraduate degree in Australia, and Micah was fortunate to be selected as one of the recipients of this prestigious JAF scholarship. Even now, he still cannot imagine how he has achieved all these things, as his simple goal was only to finish an undergraduate degree. He is very thankful to all his mentors from his university for moulding him, and to ACIAR for the confidence and trust bestowed on him by granting the scholarship.

From September 23 - 27, 2013, Micah had the chance to meet some of the JAF scholars from different countries and the ACIAR staff, and he was able to establish valuable networks during the annual meeting-workshop sponsored by ACIAR. The scholarship and training provided by ACIAR represents the biggest highlight in Micah's life thus far, in his journey to becoming a more competent agriculturist who can be of help in his field and profession in his home country.

## Minh's story – *Life is changing with ACIAR's aid*

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Minh was born in the rural countryside in Vietnam where his parents are plain farmers, spending whole the day on their farm and orchard. In fact, in most of the area around Minh's hometown, people are living with agricultural production, for example growing rice, vegetables, fruit or livestock and poultry. Perhaps Minh was very lucky in comparison with other children in his area because his family had enough economic resources for him to go to and learn at a public school. He knew that there was only one way, through study, that could help himself, his family and also other people who might be poorer than his family. Therefore he tried his best and studied very hard in his secondary and high school to achieve his own target and expectation.

At the end of studying in his high school, Minh was attracted by one of his family relatives because of her professional success in an agricultural pesticide company. She had been earning a lot of money due to her business in marketing and selling a huge amount of chemical products for famers to protect crops. Again, Minh's target was promoted, and he struggled to be successful in his study about agronomy in a university in the Mekong Delta region.

Minh's scientific life in the agricultural discipline has been continuing since 1999. After succeeding in the annual examination for university entrance, Minh started his agronomy study in the College of Agriculture and Applied Biology in Can Tho University. At the beginning of his study, Minh still expected that his future career would be in one of the agro-chemical companies in which he would receive a high salary to support his family's life. However, throughout his four-year period in the university, Minh's plan for his future profession was completely changed. From the lectures and experiences of lecturers who were scientists or seniors researching agricultural fields for many years, Minh recognized that agro-chemicals are not only the cause of increasing famers' costs for agricultural activities, but they are also a cause of polluting the surrounding environment, which directly or indirectly affects human health through food consumption. Moreover, famers are poor people, hence why should they be encouraged to use more agrochemicals, which would reduce their income at the end of the crop season. Therefore, the question set up in Minh's mind was how to help farmers to increase their agricultural production sustainably, by applying new techniques and practices instead of using a lot of agrochemicals. As a result, Minh decided to stay at the agriculture faculty of Can Tho University in order to work as a young and enthusiastic researcher.

Minh then had an opportunity to collaborate with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) due to staying and working at his agriculture faculty. Since 2004, Minh has worked and participated in many research projects in his department. Through these projects, he went to rural areas to know how difficult life in these communities is, and he also recognized how much benefit his projects brought to those communities to improve their livelihood. However, one



of the big challenges faced by agriculture in his region of living is the negative impact of climate change on agricultural production activities. Minh was lucky to be involved in one of the projects which ACIAR is funding in Vietnam to help Vietnam's agriculture adapt with climate change. From this project, Minh has come to know more about ACIAR's functions and activities. Consequently, he learned about the John Allwright Fellowship and he has become one of the awardees of this program since 2012.

If someone asked Minh what he is thinking about ACIAR, he would answer, "ACIAR is changing my life". Indeed, thanks to ACIAR's scholarship Minh came to Australia where he has a good chance to study and work in a professional research environment; where he can make contact with many experts from Australian universities and institutes, for example, the Australian National University, or the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO); and where he can build his working network with many other colleagues worldwide. Minh thinks that he must take advantage of this opportunity to finish his PhD study in Australia as successfully as possible. He always expects ACIAR activities will be expanded further in developing countries, especially in his country where most people's livings are based on agriculture. On the top of his targets, Minh would like to keep strong contact with ACIAR after he graduates so that he is properly successful in applying for development research grants in the future. Successes in Minh's profession and his own life may never have occurred in reality without ACIAR's support.

## *Of Cane Toads and fish farms – A story from Fiji*

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Monal grew up in a small town in the tiny Pacific island nation of Fiji. As a small child he would make frequent trips to his mother's vegetable garden behind the family home, and find as many small animals as he could. These animals came in many different shapes and sizes, and included house geckos, Cane Toads, as well as various types of insects. There was always something fascinating about these animals for him, and quite often they would end up travelling from the garden into the house with him, provided that they were small enough to fit inside his pockets of course. This proved to be a constant source of frustration for his mother, as she would find the mangled bodies of crickets or millipedes in Monal's laundry, after it had been through the washing machine!

As Monal grew older, the animals gradually found more permanent (and safer) places of residence inside the family home, usually in the form of aquaria or terraria. At one point towards his later high school years, the Lal residence was home to four human beings, a pair of chickens, a dog, two cats, two hundred aquarium fish, a Fijian Boa Constrictor and five families of Cane Toads.

When faced with the question of what to study at university, the decision to venture into the field of aquaculture was quite an easy one for Monal, as fish were by the far the easiest animals to keep alive in captivity for any decent length of time.

Several years later, having been lucky enough to receive a scholarship to complete his studies in aquaculture, he reflects that it was those early years in his mother's garden which set him on his path. The decision to become an aquaculture scientist is one that he has never regretted. It has allowed him to visit a number of different countries, experience a range of cultures, and meet many fascinating people, all the while engaging in constant learning about his chosen field of study. He describes the award of his John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) scholarship as one of the best experiences of his life, and one from which he believes he will grow throughout his personal and professional life. He is convinced that a scholarship program such as the one he is currently in is making an immeasurable contribution to his personal and professional development, without which he might be in a very different place from where he is today.

## *'Nugie is a scientist. We don't need scientists.'*

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"You should study harder!" yelled dad to Nugie. Nugie is the first boy, the youngest sibling of five children in his family. He got every privilege of boys in traditional Javanese culture. He never washes clothes, no need to cook for eating, and he can even easily ask a servant to make him a cup of tea. But his daddy, the only Master of Public Health in the town, graduated from the USA, and was always upset when he found Nugie was away from his desk during study time in the evening. "You will not be able to go overseas if you are lazy!" The only thing that made his daddy happy for Nugie to be away from the desk was the world news TV channel, watching starvation in Ethiopia, apartheid in South Africa, the Iraq-Iran war, and the Pact of Warsaw. Going overseas unconsciously became one of the boy's dreams. He was keen on reading his father's books brought from the USA, although he did not really understand the content. But kidney failure took his daddy's life, on the last day of Nugie's final exam at Senior High School, after a full year of struggling with coming and going from hospital for dialysis. Nugie lost his idol and lost his passion. With the help of his uncle, he applied to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. He was already daunted. He chose the subject merely because his uncle was a vet. No appetite, he just went and wrote the answers during the selection exam, and went back home.

Life went on, and Nugie was accepted by the Faculty. In the second year he met Dr Isrina, his lecturer, who had just come back from her PhD in Germany. She reminded Nugie of his father and he tried to find out how he could find the way to go overseas. Knowing that research is one of the ways to go overseas, Nugie tried to find the way to do research. He asked Dr Isrina to supervise his team in a research competition, and winning the first prize in a national scale competition made him more confident that he could do research.

After completing his Vet school degree, Nugie started to realise that he did not like companion animal practices, not because of the animals but because the owners are mostly rich people who would spend money to feed dogs and neglect unfortunate people, and in some instances they were arrogant in Nugie's view. He decided to move to farm animals. Nugie got a job in an abattoir in Papua, supplying beef for a mining company. Still he found social class divisions in this kind of world; the management and labor classes. Nugie chose his way to stand up for the labor, and of course his manager was trembling: "Nugie is a scientist. We don't need scientists." After completing his contract in the company, the local government offered him a position in the Animal Husbandry Office. He finally discovered that a position in a local office was probably the most appropriate job for his kind of mind. He worked for smallholder farmers!!!!

As a person who had previously worked with an Australian manager, Nugie's English was considered advanced by his boss, and when an ACIAR scientist visited Timika in 2006, Nugie was asked to

accompany the guest. At the airport Nugie introduced himself and mentioned to the man that he had some projects with smallholder farmers. The man gave him a business card and said, “Send me an e-mail.” Nugie kept in contact with him, hoping that the man could help him to realise his dream: study overseas. In 2008 the ACIAR man was interested in Nugie’s work on serologic surveillance of *Streptococcus suis*, and he invited Nugie to present his work. That was the pathway for Nugie to get a John Allwright Fellowship (JAF). And not only the JAF – Nugie found ‘Dad’ in the man. Nugie learnt wisdom, how to communicate with traditional people, how to communicate with bureaucrats, how to make friends and of course, he learnt how to conduct a project and do research by being involved with the ACIAR project that the man led.

Meeting up with JAF awardees from other countries last week made up Nugie’s mind that there were huge numbers of other cultures beyond his own country’s rich culture. Understanding is needed more than he realised previously. Nugie was also starting to find that he probably could work together, sharing knowledge with scientists from other countries to benefit the farmer in his own workplace, and theirs. Connecting researchers across countries is probably the greatest take home message that Nugie obtained from the meeting. Nugie is now more confident to state the aim of his life which has become clearer – improving the efficiency of smallholder farms in developing countries.



## *Sami's story – Personal and professional life of an ACIAR JAF*

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Sami was born in a developing country of South Asia. His family was well known for a strong agricultural background, as well as being in the public services. Sami grew up, mainly, in an urban environment except for short term visits to spend vacations at his parental farmlands. He always wanted to be a doctor, but he could not get there. Ultimately, with the advice of his grandfather, who was an agri-graduate and serving Dean in one of the agricultural universities of his country, he was offered a place to study agriculture. Considering it to be appropriate advice amongst the available options, he accepted it and started his undergraduate degree. He completed his graduation with distinction and got admission to a postgraduate research degree. That was the time when the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) started a project in his country and Sami got the opportunity to work in that project. Sami worked days and nights in order to achieve the objectives of the ACIAR project, and he was equally rewarded for his hard work. He got exposure and opportunities to work in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the UAE, Singapore and China with some of the known experts in their areas. He also got a lot of opportunities for overseas training and presenting at conferences on behalf of the project. Meanwhile, Sami got married to his cousin, and soon after his marriage, he was blessed with a son.

On the conclusion of the first phase of his project, Sami was successful in getting an ACIAR John Allwright Fellowship to do a Ph.D in Australia. Sami shifted to Australia with his wife and son and he is now living in Queensland with his family and working on his Ph.D project.

Sami strongly believes that... you are known by the company you keep... He likes to make friends and (at least) professional connections wherever he gets the opportunity to go, and whoever he gets the opportunity to work with.

The JAF 2013 workshop of ACIAR has provided Sami with an exciting opportunity, not only to learn the skills of scientific writing but also to work with and make friendship contacts with people of his age group working in and around his area of interest. This network will help Sami to work together with some of the other participants of JAF 2013 in the future. Aligning with the ACIAR priority areas, the outcomes of this workshop and networking will help Sami to think in a global context while considering options to do further research at any stage of his professional career, and will promote possible new avenues for research in collaboration with other researchers working in his field of interest.

## Supre's story – *Creating a better world for everyone through agriculture*

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At the meeting of the John Allwright Fellows' week in Canberra, Supre, a junior agricultural researcher from a developing country, was even more encouraged to dedicate his life to contributing to the creation of a world where everyone is well fed and nourished. By knowing more closely about ACIAR with its activities and priorities, and meeting other JAF colleagues with their great ideas, he was more motivated to show to the world, especially to young people, the role of smallholder farmers in agricultural and food systems. There he said that smallholder farmers, who always dedicate their lives to us and yet are often still marginalized, have a right to get our help to improve their welfare.

Supre's will to dedicate his life to helping poor people, especially poor farmers, has been nurtured since childhood. He spent his childhood years in rural areas with the field as one of his favourite playing areas. With his brothers and sisters, like many other rural teenagers, he spent some of his time helping his parents doing planting and harvesting in small scale farming. He was very much influenced by his big family and his community. He has always said that it was from them that he learned how to love the work in the field which is not easy and is high risk, and which is directly engaged with the poor people in rural areas.

Formally, Supre started to study about agriculture in 1998 after passing the selection for new university students based on his achievements in senior high school. After university, he was accepted as junior staff at the Ministry of Forestry but he resigned before the job placement. His wish was actually to become a journalist but he failed in some of the selection process. It was his father who prompted him to return to his former university to become "an educator". He then started to work for the university in academic and research activities as well as serving the community.

For more than five years now, Supre has been involved in teaching and carrying out research in agricultural fields. As a lecturer, he has also been engaged in community service such as providing training for farmers. His activities have provided him with greater opportunities to understand more deeply the problems faced by farmers and their livelihoods. He has realized that many farmers and rural communities in developing countries are close to poverty. His activities have also provided experiences to interact with students from many different backgrounds who will potentially create a better society in the future. More specifically, he expects his students to be able to contribute to the future of agricultural development.



However, above all, Supre has realized that all his experiences are limited. In order to fulfil his dream he needs to improve his expertise, his capacity and his leadership, and to develop networks to cooperate with others. With his family support, he hopes he will have many great opportunities to gain more knowledge, skills and experiences during his study in Australia and as part of ACIAR to develop a clear understanding of how to contribute in working towards pro-poor agricultural development.



Presenters Margaret Cargill and Kate Cadman with some of the JAF fellows

## Tho's story – A dream never ends...

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“Are you dreaming in day time?” is often the question that Tho's friends ask her when she talks about something that hardly ever happens. She knows that she is a 'hard-headed' girl who used not to obey rules set by her parents, then she would try to illustrate that her thoughts or her actions are right. In fact, her successes in life, some of which seem impossible to obtain, are results of her dreams that will be built up along her life.

Yes, she believes in her dreams, which actually comes from her dad, a retired teacher in Vietnam. When she was a little girl, her dad usually told her, “My dear, you have to have a dream in your mind and then try to make it come true. Although you might be feeling miserable, that would make you the happiest person when you reach your dream.” Therefore she started to dream. She dreamed to be the best student in class, while she was born with her weight only 1.6kg, small and weak. She dreamed that she could have a nice writing style, when she got only 5/10 for literature. When she grew up, she dreamed to speak English well, yet she was studying Russian for 10 years. However, the dreams in her mind are such strong ones that they helped her overcome all the challenges. Those dreams were so strong that she was able to get a rare chance to go to Ireland to study on a scholarship, and she still believes that this was because of her application, which began with “I have a dream...”

And now, as a mother of a 10-year-old son, Tho is still dreaming. She knows her life currently in Australia with her husband and son is really like a dream because she enjoys her life in a positive environment of studying and living. She believed that she would have more colourful dreams when she was lucky enough to be chosen by ACIAR as a PhD candidate.

Tho has found that ACIAR is an organization providing her and their staff with many opportunities to dedicate themselves to a learning process that is seen in whatever ACIAR's projects are, wherever their staff go. And of course, Tho has a bigger dream now. She hopes the learning process will help her to broaden her knowledge as well as to apply it in her life and career when she goes back home after studying. This learning process is particularly seen in the tasks of ACIAR, which encourage its staff to use their expertise to strengthen the capacity of colleagues from developing countries by working together. These staff also learn how to replicate the best models from their research locations for others, and how to utilize the local expertise to achieve the common goals collaboratively set by ACIAR and the localities. This can be called a participatory learning process, which makes their mission of international agricultural research become a collaborative mission.

Tho feels so lucky to work with ACIAR, which will help her to build up the dream of her life and career. In her belief, having a dream and making it come true is a way of living a positive life and

being happy. In the journey to make a dream come true, Tho has tasted bitter and sweet, she has met constrains and supports; however, she is still dreaming and believing in a bright future. So, she would like to wish you also to have a dream and never let it end.



From an ACIAR aquaculture project  
With thanks to Monal Lal

## Vee's story – How Vee became an agronomist

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Vee was born and grew up in an extended family where most of the family members stay in one house or live nearby each other. Her family runs a small shop at home selling many, many kinds of things which change from year to year depending on their market value. Her house has changed from coffee shop to minimart, to bike shop, to hardware and to an electronic appliance shop, until recently. By helping in the family business, Vee knows she does not want to become a vendor.

While she was a child, Vee loved to spend her time with her grandfather, staying at the fish pond in the back yard of the house, which was surrounded with mango and coconut trees. Her grandfather was a retired soldier and frequently taught her to respect every item of food provided on a plate. The words that she would usually hear are “ Don't play with your food, don't waste your food. You have to think about how hard your parents work to get this food, and think of people in other places where they do not have not enough food to eat and finish all the food on your plate.”

When Vee finished high school and had to choose what she would study next in university, she told her family that she would like to study agronomy and it was a surprise for them, except for her grandpa. Most of the family members said to her, “Agronomist is not a good job, the salary is low, and your parents have a business so why don't you study accounting or some other related subject.” She answered them confidently that business is important but, she said, “For me food is very important to all of us. Everyone is always hungry (at least 3 times a day), so agronomy is important too, especially in the food chain. Agronomy is considered as one of the vital food producer subjects.” Since that day her parents have understood and supported her in her choice.

While studying in her first year at university, Vee luckily got a scholarship to study abroad, However the scholarship did not cover the airfare fee, which was very expensive for her family. She told her parents about the scholarship and surprisingly her mother decided to buy it for her. Her mother supported her to study because she wanted her to finish her mother's own dream. Her mother did not study for a higher degree as a result of the fact that that she was the oldest girl and she had to take care of the family while grandpa went to the war.

After Vee finished her Masters degree and went back home, she started to work at the research station that belongs to the government. Here she has the chance to meet and work with many people, with farmers, and other organizations. She is very proud of her job and never regrets with her choice.

Vee always dreamed to continue to study for a PhD and work closely with the farmers. Once she had the chance to work cooperatively with an ACIAR project. She learnt a lot from ACIAR experts about how to do researches that aim to help farmers by identifying their problems in depth and looking for

the best solutions for them. She noticed that the ACIAR activities that she has worked with always come from the objective of the farmers' needs. For her, ACIAR's works not only help the farmers' livelihood but also help her country's researchers and policy makers to match and cooperate with farmers. Vee is very happy to work with ACIAR.

With support from her office and the ACIAR experts, her project questions from a field work with ACIAR have become her research topic, and with the support of the John Allright Fellowship scholarship, part of her dream has come true. And now Vee is studying for her PhD. She hopes to finish well and get back to her work, use the knowledge that she has gained to help farmers to produce more food, and so become a good effective agronomist.



With thanks to Vilayphone Sourideth

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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Pakistan from 2007 to 2011. Sohail was then awarded an Endeavour Executive Award to learn the principles of agribusiness supply chain management at the University of Queensland from January to May 2009. In 2011, Sohail was awarded an ACIAR John Allwright Fellowship (JAF) to do a Ph.D on avocado supply chains at the University of Queensland.

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**Suprehatin** is a lecturer in the Department of Agribusiness, Faculty of Economics and Management, at the Bogor Agricultural University (IPB), Indonesia. He is currently working on his PhD in Global Food Studies at The University of Adelaide in South Australia. Earlier, he obtained an Australian Development Scholarship (ADS) to gain a Masters Degree at the University of Adelaide.

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