



Australian Government  
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# Capacity Building Policy

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## Why develop a policy?

As Australia's specialist international agricultural research for development agency, ACIAR builds the capacity of individuals and institutions in developing countries to expand, administer and undertake agricultural research<sup>1</sup>.

We have a legislative responsibility to deliver training and capacity building that supports research for development. Capacity building is a key pathway to improving agricultural research for development and for disseminating research outputs to help meet the long-term development gains of our partner countries.

ACIAR brings a unique approach to capacity building in development, through our focus on agricultural development and the development of long-term partnerships with institutions and individuals. ACIAR's capacity building has delivered, and will continue to deliver, value for money and strong outcomes for Australia and for partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

ACIAR is developing a new 10-year strategy to focus its research portfolio on agri-food systems in the Indo-Pacific Region towards six high-level objectives. The objectives are:

- Improving food security and reducing poverty among smallholder farmers and rural communities;
- Managing natural resources and producing food more sustainably, adapting to climate variability and mitigating climate change;
- Enhancing human nutrition and reducing risks to human health.
- Improving gender equity and empowerment of women and girls
- Fostering more inclusive agrifood and forestry market chains, engaging the private sector where possible
- Building scientific and policy capability within our partner countries.

These strategic goals reflect the outcomes we are seeking to achieve, consistent with Australian Official Development Assistance (ODA) priorities, and contributing to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The new long-term vision positions the role of capacity building as core to ACIAR's approach and business. ACIAR has made a decision to strategically focus on capacity building that fosters leadership and career development for beneficiaries. In addition to the strategic vision, we have commissioned an independent review of our capacity building approaches. This policy supports the strategic vision and the findings of the review by detailing how we will undertake capacity building and ensure its ongoing effectiveness.

## What is Capacity Building in ACIAR?

ACIAR views capacity as the ability of individuals, organisations and systems to perform agricultural research for development effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Capacity building for ACIAR is thus a process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organisations, and systems to undertake agricultural research and to continue to advance development outcomes. Capacity building occurs across multiple levels — individual, organisational and institutional — and is much more than merely transferring skills and knowledge through

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<sup>1</sup> 'Agriculture' in ACIAR, includes crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry, soils, water, agribusiness, economics and social sciences.

training. It includes on-the-job training, leadership, mentoring, two-way-transfers of ideas and technologies, and empowerment to undertake research. ACIAR considers capacity building holistically throughout all of our research activities, including investments in projects, fellowships, and interactions with Australian and developing-country scientists and project staff.

ACIAR's approach includes both formal and project-based capacity building. The formal suite of capacity building includes:

- John Allwright Fellowship Program: providing formal postgraduate training
- John Dillon Fellowship Program: providing intensive career development training
- Support to the Crawford Fund: to deliver training and links with Australian-based networks, master-classes and an annual conference in Parliament House
- International institutional support programs: delivering capacity building through our global program (such as the Australia-Africa Plant Biosecurity Partnership and contributions to regional organisations)
- Event funding to facilitate networking and dissemination of knowledge
- Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID) network: supporting early-career Australian researchers to engage with agricultural research for development.

Capacity building is also a key component of our portfolio of research projects. Our projects use a range of bespoke capacity building approaches, including explicit organisational support, individual on-the-job training, mentoring and learning by doing, supporting linkages with Australian institutions, and facilitating the development of networks. The flexible nature of these approaches has been highlighted as a significant strength of ACIAR's approach, allowing us to adapt to specific country, institutional and individual circumstances.

## Capacity Building – Policy Approach

During the next 10 years ACIAR's capacity building will deliver a range of innovative capacity building approaches, focused at multiple-levels (individual, organisational and institutional), and promoting gender equity, for effective international agricultural research for development in the Indo–Pacific region.

ACIAR will deploy approaches at *multiple-levels* based on sound analysis, determining where the greatest value can be found from our investments in capacity building. This analysis will be driven-locally from in-country partners as well as from the expertise of our network of country-officers and partners.

We will ensure all capacity building approaches are *gender-aware* and will work towards gender-parity in our formal capacity building programs. In line with ACIAR's strategic objective of Empowering Women and Girls, as well as ACIAR's Gender Equity Policy and Strategy outcomes, ACIAR will develop a women-specific capacity building program. This program will provide women researchers with an opportunity to advance their agricultural research and leadership skills. We will also ensure that project-level capacity building efforts use gender-aware analysis and practices.

Monitoring will be key to measure effectiveness and we will *monitor and evaluate* our capacity building approaches. In line with ACIAR's aim of strengthening monitoring and evaluation, we will ensure capacity building is monitored in a comprehensive manner, enabling us to track progress, learn lessons, and report on achievements at project, program, thematic, portfolio and whole-of-agency levels.

ACIAR has a proud history of supporting innovation in research for development and *innovation* will be key in the execution of this policy. By seeking out industry and private sector partners, as well as trialling new approaches, ACIAR's capacity building will continue to support the two-way exchange of new ideas between our partner countries and Australia.

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## How we will do it

In implementing our capacity building policy, ACIAR will build on the success of our current portfolio of approaches and strengthen the alignment with our new 10 year strategy. We will:

1. *Enhance our fellowship programs.* Recognising the value of supporting future research leaders in developing countries, and the value of these fellows to our in-country projects, we will increase the alignment of our fellowship programs with our 10 year strategy. This will include ensuring ACIAR's strategic objectives are explicitly referenced in the selection of scholars and their training programs. ACIAR will work with partner countries to identify country specific priorities for postgraduate and research management capacity building as part of the country consultation processes. Moreover we will work towards the target of ensuring gender parity in our fellowship programs, reflecting our commitment to gender equality in research. We will also strengthen our ties with ACIAR scholarship alumni through the development of an ACIAR alumni network.
2. *Deliver a women's fellowship and leadership program.* Recognising the roles that women play in agriculture, and their relative lack of access to training, leadership and promotion opportunities, we will develop a women's researcher and leadership program. We propose to design a program that will take an innovative approach to achieving changes at individual, institutional and national levels by empowering women to participate more effectively in agricultural research in the Indo-Pacific region. This approach will expand the application of research for agricultural development and address poverty and inequality.
3. *Deploy enhanced training and learning approaches in capacity building.* ACIAR will strengthen capacity needs assessment at both the project and program levels and will deliver improved training and learning approaches. By linking capacity needs assessments with fit-for-purpose training and learning, we will ensure that our projects are investing in the individuals, organisations and institutions that are going to have the greatest development impact.
4. *Deliver an Australian researcher program,* Recognising that ACIAR has developed and continues to develop innovative agricultural research outputs, we will enhance the transfer of knowledge and skills to the Australian agricultural sector. We will do this through the development of explicit programs linking Australian researchers' career development with ACIAR's in-country research, with a focus on early-career and mid-career researchers. We will trial new approaches in this effort and ensure a strong partnership with Australian industry bodies, universities and the private sector.
5. *Deliver an ACIAR Alumnus.* Building on the strength of the ACIAR network across the Indo-Pacific region, we will deliver an alumni network. This network will consolidate and disseminate research findings as well as expand our reach and deliver science diplomacy benefits to Australia. The network will be driven from our country officers and will include country-specific networking and outreach activities.