

## Building capacities – building bridges

*Purvi Mehta-Bhatt*

'ILRI was the only place in Africa, where I could get the international level training in livestock research'; 'I may now be an African policy maker, but one of the greatest contributing factors to my ability to lead this position came from the two years I spent at ILCA as a graduate fellow'...

These are some statements and sentiments from ILRI's alumni, people who were trained at ILRI and are now ambassadors for us throughout Africa...

*Some present ILRI scientists who were once graduate fellows at ILRI:*

- Steve Staal
- Delia Grace
- Rob Skilton
- Bernard Bett
- Isabelle Baltenwick

Investments in capacity development and strengthening regional abilities in livestock research have been one of ILRI's greatest contributions towards development. In the past ten years, these efforts have been reinforced further by having a dedicated capacity development unit and clear strategy.

Every year, some 43 graduate fellows join ILRI's Addis Ababa and Nairobi campuses to work towards their PhD and MSc research. Many continue to stay with ILRI and become an asset for the institution.

The large number of human resources trained at ILRI become ILRI's ambassadors and carries the capacities to extend ILRI's messages of development and sustainability to many parts of developing world..They hold a 'soft corner for ILRI' as one ILRI alumni put it.

## Looking into the future

Building capacities, by its nature, is futuristic. It is an investment into future generation of leaders and scientists. While ILRI remains committed towards its graduate fellowship program, in-house training and mentorship to a selected (but a significantly large) number of students, there is a limit to the number of students that we can support. We need to strengthen our engagements to extend our program to students across Africa and Asia through other mechanisms such as distance learning, better engagement with regional universities, and helping regional policies on education and extension.

Universities can be important catalysts in extending our research outputs to developmental outcomes. Incorporating some of the research outputs into university curricula, engaging with faculty training to augment teachers' ability to teach and have a system thinking, and extending the ILRI human resource base as visiting faculties to universities are some areas we can explore more in the future.

ILRI's investment in building regional capacities is in line with the Chinese proverb on sustainability, 'teach them how to fish rather than feeding them the fish.' We remain committed to help build regional capacities so that future generation can 'harvest their own fish' rather than depend on others to feed them!

*Contributed by Purvi Mehta-Bhatt, Head of the Capacity Strengthening Unit at ILRI.*

*On 9 and 10 November 2011, the ILRI Board of Trustees hosted a 2-day 'liveSTOCK Exchange' to discuss and reflect on livestock research for development.*

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