Graduate fellowships: developing future leaders in research at the International Livestock Research Institute

Joyce Maru

The International Livestock Research Institute’s (ILRI) graduate fellowship program has grown from strength to strength. In 2015, ILRI offered opportunities to 206 young scientists and graduate fellows from national agricultural research organizations (NARS), universities and other partner institutions globally. These emerging researchers undertake research for development activities within ILRI projects, access ILRI research facilities and are mentored by ILRI senior scientists, themselves engaged in cutting-edge agricultural research.

“ILRI offers an environment with good ambience and a strong emphasis on self-directed learning facilitated by a large pool of professionals who provide strong support.”

Gregory Sikumba
PhD Fellow
Animal Sciences for Sustainable Productivity (ASSP)

2015 breakdown of graduate fellow (as of 30 November 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Graduate fellows (PhD/MSc)</th>
<th>Research fellows (non-degree)</th>
<th>Interns</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution by program of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>MSc</th>
<th>N/A—from NARs</th>
<th>BSc</th>
<th>Diploma and certificate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“ILRI capacity development brief—December 2015”
ILRI collaboration with DAAD

DAAD is a publicly funded self-governing organisation of German higher education institutions that promotes international academic exchange, as well as educational cooperation with developing countries through a variety of funding and scholarship programs. Through a collaborative co-funding arrangement, ILRI and DAAD offered eight PhD scholarships in 2015 to sub-Saharan African (SSA) nationals to engage in quality research-for-development in ILRI projects.

ILRI and the CIRCLE program for early-career researchers

The Climate Impact Research Capacity and Leadership Enhancement in sub-Saharan Africa (CIRCLE) program—a UK Department for International Development initiative—develop the skills and research output of early-career climate change researchers in Africa. Running from 2014 until 2018, the program is managed by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the African Academy of Sciences.

ILRI has also participated in the CIRCLE program both as a ‘host’ and ‘home’ institute, hosting fellows from other research and academic institutions and nominating researchers for secondment opportunities in other sub-Saharan institutions. The program is supported by the ILRI Livestock Systems and Environment program and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security. In addition to building up a body of relevant research, CIRCLE seeks to strengthen research-uptake mechanisms and help institutions realize a holistic and development-focused strategic approach to climate change research.

ILRI Graduate Fellowship Journal Club

Launched in January 2015, the ILRI Graduate Fellowship Journal Club has been a useful platform for ILRI fellows to meet regularly and discuss recent journal publications, exchange ideas, and critically evaluate each other’s work. The Journal Club plays a vital role in the scientific life of graduate fellows by promoting evidence-based research, helping fellows develop critical appraisal skills through discussion, and fostering interdisciplinary relations and learning.

Cross-cutting learning interventions for early-career researchers

In collaboration with the Research Methods Group and the People and Organizational Development Unit, the ILRI Capacity Development (CapDev) Unit has provided a range of learning opportunities—including a blended series of ‘bite-sized’ modular courses—to graduate fellows and research staff. These have adopted various pedagogic approaches such as e-learning, mentorship support, and evidence and assessment. These modules include training in conducting literature reviews; designing research studies; collecting, managing and analysing data; and scientific writing to help participants effectively share research findings.

ILRI fellowship information system

In October 2015, a CGIAR-wide new graduate fellowship information system was launched. The new system seeks to improve the management of ILRI graduate fellows and interns. This is a move away from a disparate—cumbersome—system of storing information. The new automated system will help CapDev Unit provide a much better and timely service to internal stakeholders, including program users, research managers, fellows and interns. The system captures the whole ILRI graduate fellowship business process, from recruitment to alumni management.
Capacity development is a prominent feature of ILRI’s strategy. This refers to the intentional and purpose-driven efforts to increase stakeholder capacity to undertake and use research to generate development outcomes and scale up in a sustainable manner. ILRI Capacity Development Briefs highlight the depth and breadth of these ILRI and partner activities, and are circulated to contribute to improved practices and better lives through livestock. The briefs are purposively kept short and provide ‘snapshots’ of the topics they cover.

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