

In 2011, promising young rice scientists and future leaders from around the world joined the Global Rice Science Partnership to undertake research and training in areas ranging from plant pathology to the social sciences. This is the first time such programs have been available at the international level and integrated across different global rice science institutes.



IRRI

The future of rice science

The 2011 Global Rice Science Scholarships offered young agricultural scientists the chance to build their expertise in their discipline and to have a broader understanding of global issues that affect rice science. The opportunity was open to global competition, but with a primary focus on students from developing countries.

Research areas covered by the scholarship are rice science and related systems research, particularly on agronomy, crop physiology, entomology, plant pathology, soil and water science, plant breeding, and the social sciences.

The scholarships fall under the framework of GRiSP—with IRRI, AfricaRice, CIAT, IRD,¹ and CIRAD² all hosting students. In total, 31 students were granted a scholarship and their thesis projects were aligned with the strategic objectives of GRiSP. Looking at the spread of students by region, 55% come from Asia, 29% from Africa, 13% from South America, and 3% from Europe. A gender balance was achieved with 45% of the selected candidates being women.

¹Institut de recherche pour le développement.

²Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement.

Passing the torch of rice science

Tahir Hussain Awan from Pakistan started his project in 2011 on weeds and nutrient management in dry direct-seeded rice at IRRI and the University of the Philippines Los Baños. He says that rice is mostly transplanted in Pakistan, but, if improved dry-seeding techniques were adopted, this could save time, labor, and resources.

“The scholarship is important for me to study the abovementioned components of direct-seeded rice at the world’s best rice institute under the supervision of scientists who have vast experience,” he says.

Another scholar, Jianyuan Yang from China, says that the Global Rice Science Scholarships have given him an opportunity to travel abroad to learn more about the global issues related to rice disease research. “Rice diseases such as rice blast, bacterial blight, and brown spot are the most devastating diseases in rice production and they occur in most rice-growing regions in the world,” he says, indicating that he hopes his work will help overcome these diseases.

The next step

The capacity-building funds of GRiSP also supported the piloting

of a new initiative—the Enhancing Global Rice Science Leadership Course. The course was conceptualized by IRRI and the University of Leuven in Belgium to develop leadership in rice research.

The program aimed at improving the impact of the knowledge from research organizations, particularly in the targeted poorest areas of Asia and Africa, by ensuring improved skills and competencies in research leadership. The course of study aimed at capturing the knowledge, skills, and competencies required by researchers to enable them not only to better define, manage, and communicate research but also to assume leadership in research.

The course consisted of a 2-week intensive activity from 15 to 26 August 2011, followed by an Action Learning Project in the participants’ own environment during September to December with a final week of reflection and further learning during 9-13 January 2012. The 23 course participants comprised PhD scholars, alumni PhD scholars, postdoctoral fellows, and young internationally recruited scientists from AfricaRice (2), CIAT (2), IRRI (14), and recent IRRI alumni (5). 🍌