

The Crawford Fund Annual Conference 2024

Scholar Reflections



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AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY ACT Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Our 2024 ACT scholars (left to right) Arifah Hidayati, Lucy Darragh and Mariane Johnstone pictured with ACT Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Dave Shearer and Committee Chair Dr Wendy Craik.

Lucy Darragh, Australian National University

Mentor: David Shearer

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference was a unique opportunity to connect with global leaders and explore the complex challenges and possibilities in international agricultural development and associated research. The conference's focus on 'Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design' brought together individuals and organisations with diverse knowledges, research interests and priorities, all united by a shared passion for sustainable agricultural development.

The conference showcased an extensive diversity of countries, communities, crop types, and collaborative partnerships, each highlighting unique challenges, deep-seated issues, and inspiring opportunities. From the many engaging speakers, several stood out for their thought-provoking talks that resonated deeply with me, leaving a lasting impression.

Hussein Tadicha Wario's signal to think more deeply and to challenge dominant narratives regarding approaches to agricultural development (in the drylands of Kenya), aligns my personal research interests and elements of my PhD project. His emphasis on the need to recognise, acknowledge, and possibly rethink, how projects are conceptualised, challenges us to move beyond dominant (and often deeply entrenched) narratives that so strongly shape research and development.

Madonna Thomson's talk, focused on revitalising traditional Aboriginal food practices (for nutrition, health and pharmacological benefits, as well as socio-cultural and economic transformation through Indigenous knowledge and self-determination), highlighted the often-overlooked reality that the challenges of international agriculture development, climate change, and geo- and socio-political landscapes are not just distant issues, but also pressing concerns right here in Australia. Her message around supporting continuity of cultural practice, and research partnerships that allow impacted communities to determine what ethical research looks like reiterated the importance and value of community-led research. Madonna's powerful message that, "It's not about us. It's by us", is a foundational principle of participatory approaches, and is a condition we must all meet in our approach to research to truly ensure that the voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and impacted communities are centred.

Dr Seesei Molimau-Samasoni's approach to project management and the development of strategic partnerships to support community-led research in Samoa and inclusive opportunities for students and researchers from the Pacific was truly inspiring. Her in-country examples of declining agronomic production, exacerbated by the 'brain drain' of Samoans training abroad and staying overseas, as well as the unintended consequences of Australia's agricultural working visa programs, drove home the importance of considering the broader implications of research for development initiatives (R4D). The insight she provided into the interconnectedness of these (among other) factors highlighted the risks of poorly aligned projects, which can ultimately diminish local communities' capacity to produce their own food and undermine their self-sufficiency.

Dr Ismahane Elouafi's presentation offered a timely and crucial reminder of the intricate relationships between climate challenges, public health, policy, equity, and inclusion, and their far-reaching implications for sustainable development. Her emphasis on the disproportionate impact of these issues for certain communities was a critical reminder of the complexities we face as a society. Notably, her acknowledgment of the need for improved scientific understanding of nutrition and the significant knowledge gaps that remain was a brave and motivating. Her mention that, "capacity exists, resources don't" highlighted the need for sound investment and resourcing alongside capacity building initiatives to effectively address these pressing issues.

The importance of humility in fostering genuine participatory research approaches was a recurring theme emphasised by Dr. Line Gordon, Professor Hampus Eriksson, and Dr. Uday Nidumolu. Dr. Nidumolu's engaging anecdotes showcased the effectiveness of authentic collaborative partnerships and inclusive science communication strategies, such as using dance, that are deeply rooted in context and acknowledge the intricate, dynamic challenges faced by smallholder

farmers in a rapidly changing climate. The case studies on fruit fly management and research presented by Papua New Guinean biosecurity experts, Anastasia Kawi and Patrick Nai, provided valuable insights into the practical applications of these principles. In this and similar contexts, something that continues to strike me are the narratives that non-local, western-trained researchers and communicators tend to construct around science and innovation. We often discuss and encourage the idea that local knowledges and approaches be labelled as 'cultural practice', implying that anything developed outside the walls of our ivory towers, or by the hands of those not formally trained in these institutions as 'scientists' is a departure from scientific knowledge. In turn, we see 'science' take precedence over local practice, knowledge and experience in the same contexts, despite the latter being indistinguishable from science itself. This is something that we must take more seriously in reflecting on our own research and practice.

By acknowledging the scientific value of cultural practices, we can continue to break down the artificial boundaries between traditional knowledge and 'Western' scientific approaches. This recognition is essential for fostering more inclusive and equitable research partnerships, where local knowledge and expertise are valued and respected. In doing so, we can work towards a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of culture, science, and innovation.

The Crawford Fund Conference Scholars Days activities, which ran either side of the conference, provided a unique and engaging opportunity to hear from a variety of speakers, including Keynote, Dr Line Gordon, and several affiliates of the Crawford Fund, the RAID Network and CGIAR. The individual mentors assigned to each Scholar facilitated enthusiastic personal introductions and networking opportunities, making it easier to connect with other. This element of the program was observed to be particularly great for anyone who finds conferences and cold approaches daunting or overwhelming. Importantly, vibrant social events (and great meals and catering!) helped to nourish new friendships.

Overall, the conference was a truly enriching and valuable experience that provided opportunities to learn from passionate peers, build networks and friendships, and gain insight into the challenges and possibilities associated with research for agricultural development. The emphasis on transformative partnerships, local leaderships and co-design was a timely reminder of the importance of community-led innovation and transdisciplinary approaches to drive research that is not only scientifically robust, but socially responsible.

I cannot thank the Crawford Fund and its affiliates enough for this incredible opportunity.

Arifah Hidayati, Australian National University

Mentor: Mikayla Hyland-Wood

My experience in the agriculture sector has primarily been indirect. My academic focus has been on the silvicultural aspects of forestry, beginning with my Bachelor of Forestry Science at Universitas Gadjah Mada from 2016 to 2020. However, my interest in agroforestry led me to choose this topic for my bachelor's thesis, where I conducted a case study on the characteristics of mixed-garden agroforestry managed by smallholder farmers and the gendered roles involved in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. My first professional experience was with an official development assistance (ODA) project focused on ecosystem restoration, specifically peatland—a crucial yet highly degraded ecosystem in Indonesia.

I am currently working on my thesis project, which explores peatland restoration in Jambi, Sumatra, as part of my Master of Forests program at the Australian National University. During my fieldwork, I observed how communities living around peatlands are directly impacted by stochastic events such as fires, floods, and droughts. Fish catches have been declining while grocery prices continue to soar. Food security is a pressing concern, and while ecosystem preservation and restoration are important, for many people, the primary question remains: "How can we make sure our bowls aren't empty?"

Attending the Crawford Fund Conference as one of the scholars has been a major highlight of 2024 for me. The theme, "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-design," deeply resonated with me, as I firmly believe that local communities should be at the heart of every development project. The panel brought together diverse experiences and lessons from local, national, and global perspectives. Additionally, the opportunity to network with professionals and experts across various agriculture-related fields has been invaluable.

A key takeaway for me was Dr Ismahane Elouafi's point about the importance of conducting agricultural research within a systems approach, interlinked with broader issues such as climate change, environmental challenges, and global health. This perspective aligned with Dr Deirdre Lemerle's observation that complex problems require complex solutions. Dr Wahida Maghraby emphasised the importance of treating partners as friends and ensuring mutual benefits in development projects for both donors and beneficiaries. Another standout point came from Dr Uday Nidumolu of CSIRO, who highlighted how communities rely on local, contextualised knowledge, showcasing how a community in Telangana, India, used street plays to communicate the results of an ACIAR research project.

The scholar activities were also incredibly beneficial and well-organised. We were provided with insightful presentations on building careers in international agricultural research, the necessary skills (including sensitivity to language, culture, gender, and politics), and the opportunities available through ACIAR, DFAT, and other organisations. Jumping into new fields can be daunting, but these talks were immensely helpful for us as young professionals.

The Crawford Fund has done an outstanding job of investing in impactful projects and organising activities that support the next generation of professionals. I would like to extend my thanks to the ACT Crawford Fund Committee for sponsoring my attendance, Mikayla Hyland-Wood for being an amazing mentor, the speakers and participants, as well as my fellow scholars who have contributed to my learning.

Mariane Johnstone, Australian National University

Mentor: Rosemary Deininger

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference feels like my first big step towards the career I've been dreaming of, and I couldn't be more grateful. I've always had a passion for the environment, and a curiosity for way culture and politics interact with environmental issues. Over my time at the ANU, I've developed an interest in food and nutrition security. It connects the

parts of my degree that captured me most, and importantly, gives me reasons for hope and purpose through innovative policy and research, and meaningful work. I am so grateful to Martin Amidy for bringing me into Agrifood Innovation Institute and helping me get a foot in the door. This year's Conference theme, "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnership, Local Leadership and Co- Design" aligned perfectly with my interests, and it was a real pinch-me moment to attend.

As an undergraduate, I felt worried about my lack of experience, and my lack of clarity on where exactly it is that I want to go with my career. I'm interested in food and nutrition security, but I'm also interested in diplomacy. I'm not sure if I want to go into policy or research, or both! Whilst I maybe didn't have a specific goal in mind going into the conference beyond learning as much as I could, I didn't need to worry so much! My mentor was Rosemary Deininger, and she really helped me see how a career can evolve and change, and this was only reinforced by the many conversations I had with scholars, mentors and conference attendees. I was thrilled to chat with Dr Line Gordon, as I've been following the EAT Lancet work for years. Our conversation has pushed me to consider further studies in nutrition.

The Conference also helped me better understand the fields of international agricultural research in development, food and nutrition security, sustainable food systems and sustainable diets. I also now have a lot to consider for my Honours next year! The presentations and panels across the Conference Day were incredibly insightful, and inspirational. For example, Seesei Molimau-Samasoni's words on how to approach research in a culturally safe and respectful way, with awareness of power dynamics and legacies. She spoke about what makes partnerships genuine, and I think it will stay with me forever. The final panel, with four women from across the world, was another highlight. The respectfully navigated challenging questions, supported one another and built on each other's responses, and I was in complete awe, and inspired by their sense of hope. Madonna Thompson was a fantastic and engaging speaker, and I've not stopped thinking about the state of native bush food industries in Australia.

The scholar sessions have empowered me with knowledge, advice and skills. I now have a better understanding of what opportunities are available, particularly overseas, how to reach out to people, how to communicate relevant stories to the media. Getting to know all the Scholars across the two and a half days was a joy, and it was so nice to be surrounded by so many like-minded people. I have a feeling I'll bump into some of the Scholars over time, and I look forward to it. The RAID team did a wonderful job of organising events and I'm excited to now be a member! We are so lucky to have Crawford, RAID, and ACIAR – a big thank you for the work they do, and the work involved in bringing such a fantastic event together.

NEW SOUTH WALES NSW Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Our 2024 NSW scholars (left to right) Danielle Fordham, Samantha Currie, Dinesh Jamarkattel and seated Tom Swan, Amelia Ross and Emma Kuip pictured with NSW Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Dr Helen Scott Orr, Committee Chair Dr Richard Sheldrake and Committee Member Deidre Lemerle.

Samantha Currie, Western Sydney University/NSW DPIRD

Mentor: Martin Blumenthal

Attending the Crawford Fund's 2024 Annual Conference was an enlightening and enriching experience that provided me with valuable insights into the complexities of food and nutrition security. The conference's emphasis on partnerships, local leadership, and collaboration in agricultural research for development resonated deeply with me, and I believe these elements are essential for driving impactful and sustainable change in food systems globally.

One of the key highlights of the conference was the focus on co-designing and delivering agricultural research projects that are deeply integrated into local cultures, communities, and socio-economic structures.

The discussions emphasised the importance of moving away from a top-down approach where Western-trained scientists impose their methods on developing regions. Instead, the conference advocated for genuine partnerships that prioritise local knowledge and leadership. This approach ensures that research is not only relevant but also culturally appropriate and sustainable in the long term.

The emphasis on capacity building was also a key message that stood out to me. The conference made it clear that for agricultural research to have a lasting impact, it must include efforts to build the capacity of local researchers, farmers, and communities. This involves not just training individuals but also strengthening local institutions and governance structures to ensure that the benefits of research are sustained over time. The discussions on capacity building underscored the importance of two-way learning, where knowledge is exchanged and adapted rather than simply transferred from one context to another.

Networking was another major benefit of attending the conference. The diverse range of attendees provided a rich environment for exchanging ideas and learning from different perspectives. These interactions have broadened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities in food and nutrition security and have inspired me to explore new ways of contributing to this critical field.

The Crawford Fund's 2024 Annual Conference was a highly beneficial experience that has deepened my understanding of the importance of partnerships, local leadership, and co-design in agricultural research for development. The key messages and highlights from the conference will undoubtedly inform my future work and inspire me to advocate for more inclusive and impactful approaches to food and nutrition security.

Danielle Fordham, University of Newcastle

Mentor: Seeseei Molimau-Samasoni

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference Scholar Program and Annual Conference have profoundly transformed my life and career. The true impact on my life cannot be measured, just like the countless lives its program, people, and work save every year. My 2024 experience has strengthened my bond with the Crawford Fund and expanded my network, fostering stronger and more resilient international connections that transcend boundaries and disciplines. My key takeaway is the profound sense of belonging. Connecting with numerous like-minded, passionate leaders has empowered me to explore new pathways and opportunities to work collaboratively towards a better future for all.

The 2024 Crawford Fund Annual Conference was a highly enriching event that underscored the critical role of partnerships, consultation, and collaboration in agricultural R&D. The conference featured a series of insightful sessions focused on constructing effective research partnerships, tailoring R&D to achieve local outcomes, and building resilience in food systems. By exploring a variety of research and community-led projects, the conference highlighted the necessity of co-designed projects that are relevant, credible, and effective. These discussions provided valuable lessons on fostering successful transformative partnerships and promoting local leadership across diverse research and development initiatives.

Working closely with my mentor, Adjunct Associate Professor Seeseei Molimau Samasoni, was an incredibly rewarding experience. Her invaluable support and mentorship significantly enhanced my skills and deepened my understanding of the Pacific Island nations. Her guidance was crucial in navigating the complexities of agricultural research and development in the Pacific. Inspired by her encouragement, I am committed to pursuing culturally appropriate and inclusive research that focuses on developmental solutions and practical outcomes. This approach aims not only to expand academic knowledge but also to go beyond theoretical research to make a real-world impact by supporting the capacity of Pacific Island communities and the co-protection of their unique environments. Addressing the region's needs amidst ever-growing climate and developmental challenges is paramount. I aspire for our connection to extend beyond the conference, continuing to strengthen the ties between Australia and the Pacific Island nations.

My understanding of resilience was nurtured by Dr. Line Gordon, Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre. She emphasised that resilience is often viewed merely as a tool to overcome challenges, but it is much more than that. Resilience involves diversifying inputs and outcomes, which is crucial amidst the uncertainties of climate change and biodiversity loss. The conference further explored topics that intertwined knowledge with action, highlighting that while capacity exists, resources often do not. Additionally, powerful science relies on local contextualisation, which enhances effective communication and draws inspiration from culture. When strategy is deeply intertwined with culture, it delivers diverse solutions that are suitable for the local people and environment. This approach ensures that scientific endeavours are not only relevant but also respectful and responsive to the unique needs and contexts of the communities they aim to serve.

Overall, the 2024 Annual Conference and Scholarship was a testament to the power of collaboration and the importance of integrating local knowledge and leadership in international agricultural research. It was a privilege to be part of such a dynamic and forward-thinking event and community.

Dinesh Jamarkattel, Southern Cross University

Mentor: Dr Deirdre Lemerle

The Crawford Conference 2024 has been extremely beneficial to my professional and personal development. From the start, the experience was unique, beginning with the assignment of a dedicated mentor. This was a new approach for me, and it proved to be extremely beneficial. Dr Deirdre Lemerle, my mentor, not only assisted me in connecting with researchers and professionals in international agriculture, but also encouraged me to consider my own place in this field. One memorable moment was the roundtable discussion with Crawford members, during which I learnt about the diverse work being done by fellows from various disciplines, all of which contribute to the larger goals of food security and environmental protection. This experience broadened my understanding of the many possible paths in international agriculture.

A highlight of the conference was meeting key figures in my field of interest. Among the many outstanding speakers, Dr. Uday Nidomolu of CSIRO stood out for me. His work on participatory research with farmers, particularly in climate mitigation in India, resonated strongly with my own goals. He demonstrated how involving farmers as active research participants can result in more effective and long-term outcomes. This approach to development research is consistent

with my belief in the value of grassroots involvement.

Another memorable event was the Scholars' Day activity for RAID members, during which early-career fellows shared their experiences. This session provided practical advice on how to engage with communities and stakeholders across borders, which is essential for anyone involved in international development.

Two influential speakers, Dr Line Gordon from the Stockholm Research Centre and Dr Ismahane Elouafi from CIMMYT, delivered speeches that summarised the key messages I took away from the conference. Both emphasised the value of collaboration in addressing global issues such as food security and environmental sustainability. Dr Elouafi emphasised the importance of investment, policy, equity, and inclusivity in system-level transformations, and provided many examples on how CGIAR's international programs has been executing such approaches. Meanwhile, Dr Gordon highlighted the divergent priorities of low- and high-income countries, with the former facing yield gaps and the latter dealing with environmental concerns. Despite these differences, she emphasised that collaboration is essential for achieving comprehensive and effective solutions while minimising trade-offs.

Overall, the Crawford Conference 2024 has given me new insights, connections, and a better understanding of the global agricultural landscape, emphasising the value of collaboration and innovation in this field.

Emma Kiup, The University of Sydney

Mentor: John Yaxley

My participation in the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design, was a very enlightening experience that gave me renewed motivation in my journey as a young researcher from Papua New Guinea. I am grateful and thankful to the New South Wales Crawford Fund Committee for granting me the Crawford Scholarship to attend the Conference.

The presentations and conversations at the conference were very enriching but I would like to mention especially three speakers that I found highly insightful were Dr Ismahane Elouafi (Executive Managing Director, CGIAR and former FAO Chief Scientist), Dr Seesei Molimau Samasoni (Adjunct Associate Professor from the Scientific Research Organisation of Samoa) and Ms Madonna Thomson (Aboriginal Biocultural Knowledge Holder and Practitioner). Dr Elouafi's commitment to tackling poverty and embracing sustainable food systems were truly inspiring. Dr Samasoni's speech was very impactful to me because she voiced many of the key challenges that was faced in international research in the Pacific Islands. She highlighted the importance of working with local champions who are key advocates for new innovations but in most cases are the most vulnerable. Lastly, Ms Thomson spoke passionately about indigenous knowledge and how it plays a vital role in solving current global food security issues.

The scholar-mentor pairing was a fantastic arrangement by the conference coordinators as this allowed the scholars to feel guided and engaged during the conference. I would like to express my gratitude to my mentor- John Yaxley and the other dedicated mentors who generously offered their time in providing guidance and support to the scholars during the conference.

I would also like to thank the RAID Network committee, especially the President, Mikayla Hyland-Woods for leading an excellent team who were passionate about sharing their experiences and talk about the opportunities that were available for the scholars - "The door to opportunities is endless, we just need to get up and start knocking on those doors."

The key message I took away from the conference is, it takes a holistic and collaborative effort to address the challenges in achieving food security. One innovation may address one problem, but it may create another problem in the system hence a multifaceted solution is important. Also highlighted in the conversations was the importance of respect, cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness in international research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Ms Cathy Reade and the hardworking team at the Crawford Fund for the fantastic job they did to ensure that we had the best experience at the Conference.

Amelia Ross, University of Sydney

Mentor: Cathy O'Mullan

As an undergraduate student entering my final year of study, I often myself stuck in that nebulous cloud of indecision and confusion that most students feel when regarding their future after graduation. Studying agricultural science and environmental studies, I am fortunate enough to have a plethora of potential pathways and careers to follow down. However, this immense potentiality can easily become overwhelming. The agricultural 'sector' is incomprehensibly vast and compiled with such a melange of both entwined and completely unique sub-industries. The field of developmental agriculture is no different, taking on a very amorphous nature when considering it from an outside perspective.

Coming into the Crawford Fund conference, my perspectives and understandings of the topics of developmental agriculture were very much defined by this wayward confusion with the breadth of the field. Having just returned from a study trip to Indonesia regarding rural development, I had a newly acquired physical conception of what it might look like to work in a developing country, but no idea of the bureaucracies and key international players that work within this sphere. The opportunity to attend the conference as a scholar was immensely elucidating in this regard; rubbing shoulders with the venerable leaders of organisations such as CGIAR, the Stockholm Resilience Institute, and other specific research institutions, was an amazing part of the program.

The discussions and stories shared amongst the scholars over our jam-packed three days of the conference and scholars' program were also a highlight. It is a unique opportunity to be able to engage with such a diverse array of fellow students and early-career professionals, all with the same burning passion and each with the most fascinating perspectives on any array of topics. For myself, the optimism and excitement obtained from hearing of all the incredible pathways that people have followed, and adventures and moments of growth they have experienced along the way is always incredibly valuable.

A further highlight was the many edifying and delightful interactions and conversations I engaged in with my mentor Cathy O'Mullan. Her kindness and friendship were immensely appreciated, and her insights and stories of her work were deeply informative.

Attending the conference was a unique and inspiring event, a celebration of all the revolutionary work that has already been done and is currently being executed in the name of food security and global agricultural development, as well as a critical reminder of all the work that is still to be done. I'm looking forward to being further involved in such a rewarding cause in the future.

Tom Swan, University of Sydney

Mentor: Uta Stockman

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference in Canberra was a fantastic gathering of scholars, and practitioners focused on food and nutrition security. This year's theme, "Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design," really hit home the importance of working together and involving local communities in agricultural research for development. Attendance at this conference has allowed me to re-assess my view about truly transformative partnerships, among other things.

One of the standout points of the conference was the emphasis on genuine partnerships. The Crawford Fund has always pushed for research that's not just scientifically solid but also relevant to the local context. This year's talks reinforced that successful agricultural projects need to be co-designed with local communities to make sure they meet specific needs and use local knowledge and resources.

Hearing from both Madonna Thomson and Seesei Molimau Samasoni was particularly insightful. They shared how valuable it was to co-design in a culturally and socially appropriate manner. The conference also showcased some great case studies of successful partnerships. For example, the Treaty Village Fruit Fly Trapping Program (presenters Anastasia Kawi and Patrick Nai) and showed how collaboration between Australian and PNG researchers led to effective, sustainable pest management strategies tailored to local conditions. As can occur in research, I had worked with Patrick Nai five years prior (on a different project), and it was great to see him develop as a researcher – now on the main stage at Crawford!

A significant discussion I had throughout the conference was about reframing 'Agriculture for Development' to 'Agriculture in Development' (as highlighted by Hampus Eriksson). This shift in thinking is but one way to consider power over priorities and how research programming engages in partnerships. As an early career researcher in this space, this shift in thinking has been useful for how I engage and value in-country partnerships.

The conference wrapped up with a call to action for more inclusive and equitable research collaborations. Participants were encouraged to foster partnerships that promote shared ownership, equity, and mutual learning. This collaborative spirit is essential for tackling the complex challenges of food and nutrition security in our rapidly changing world.

In summary, the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference highlighted the critical role of partnerships, local leadership, and co-design in agricultural research and development. The insights and experiences shared by participants, underscored the importance of inclusive and contextually relevant research. As the conference showed, achieving food and nutrition security requires a collective effort that bridges scientific innovation with local knowledge and needs.



NORTHERN TERRITORY NT Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Our 2024 NT scholars (left to right) Waseem Ahmed and Birendra Kunwar, pictured with NT Crawford Fund Committee Coordinator Tania Paul.

Waseem Ahmed, Charles Darwin University (CDU)

Mentor: Tania Paul

I want to share my recent experience with the Crawford Fund Conference, which began with an email from Nirmala Sunil, Research Skills and Communication Officer. The email was particularly engaging and memorable. It highlighted the Crawford Fund Student Awards, which offer students the chance to travel to a host country to research and explore their chosen topics by visiting international agricultural or aquaculture projects or CGIAR centres and opportunity for undergraduate and postgraduate students alike.

The names on the email, Tania Paul and Beth Penrose, were new to me at that time, followed by a series of emails from Larissa Mullof and Cathy Reade. These communications covered everything from flight and hotel bookings to the various activities planned over the three days. The engaging nature of the emails painted a vivid picture of the conference, which exceeded my expectations. Although I have attended many conferences before, this one was exceptional in every aspect.

The conference was an incredible experience, packed with valuable knowledge in a short period. The sessions were information-rich, and the addition of mentors welcoming scholars made a significant impact. They were eager to assist and encouraged everyone to ask questions, connect, and benefit from their expertise.

The conference theme, “Food and Nutrition Security,” was relevant to my background. I hold a bachelor’s degree of Science in Agriculture, another Bachelor’s in Business and Marketing, a Master’s by Research in Food Science and Technology, and a PhD focusing on agricultural waste, sustainability, and high-nutrient food. The theme resonated with me and fuelled my interest in attending, meeting like-minded individuals, and learning from peers and leaders.

The conference’s location was also superb, with excellent weather and a great venue that added to the overall positive experience. I gained valuable insights, such as the need to increase agricultural production by 70% to meet the demands of a growing population over the next 25 years. Discussions on global malnutrition and hunger were particularly informative.

On the third day, the RAID (Researchers in Agriculture for International Development) event was a highlight. It was my first exposure to such a platform, sparking a new passion for exploring other countries and finding innovative ways to share knowledge for mutual benefit.

I had the pleasure of meeting many scholars, and I want to mention a few—Birendra Kunwar, Dinesh, Megan, Dasuni, Zareef, Asad, and Sonali—who have since become close friends and strengthened my network. The discussions on topics like “Why International Agricultural Research,” “How to Break into International Ag Research,” “An Introduction to ACIAR,” and “So You Want to Work in a Developing Country” were particularly impactful and remain fresh in my mind.

Overall, the conference was a fantastic experience in terms of learning, networking, and exploration. The forum members were welcoming, and the environment was dynamic, supportive, and thoughtful. I used this opportunity to consider career possibilities in International Agricultural Research, meet other scholars, forge new friendships, discuss research, and seek valuable advice.

I am grateful to everyone involved in making my experience at the Crawford Fund Conference so remarkable. Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Crawford Fund NT Committee for granting me the opportunity to be a conference scholar. Through our collective efforts, we can work towards sustainable development and ensure food for all, striving to eliminate hunger and ensure that everyone has access to sufficient nourishment.

Birendra Kunwar, Charles Darwin University

Mentor: John Radcliffe

Among the 19 months spent in Australia, the month of August 2024 was one of the most productive months for me as I had the great privilege and honour to be given the opportunity to participate in the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference.

It was not just because it was my first opportunity to get out of Darwin and learn that agricultural produce needs to be increased by 70% to sustain the growing population by 2050 or double the investment by 2030 in agricultural research and innovation to end global hunger and malnutrition. It was because it provided a platform to engage with pioneering thinkers whose insights and enthusiasm have motivated me to dedicate an extra hour daily towards personal improvement. For the first time, I discovered career opportunities in International Agricultural Research and gained valuable advice on pursuing this path.

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference was a revelation, granting me insights into the complexities of addressing global food and nutrition security and facilitating invaluable networking with individuals committed to this cause. The Scholars' Program, in particular, offered a dynamic and supportive environment that was especially beneficial for someone as introverted as I am. The thoughtful pairing of scholars with mentors ensured I could navigate the event effectively, making meaningful connections with leaders in agricultural research. The Crawford Fund Conference Scholars Program is one of the most uniquely energising programs that I have ever been to. The well-organised scholar and mentor pairings were the highlight of the event.

This year's conference theme, 'Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-design', highlighted the critical challenges of our time: climate change, biodiversity loss, and health crises. These issues call for collaborative solutions, systemic transformations, and a shared knowledge approach to develop resilient responses. A significant learning point for me was the importance of food systems in enhancing resilience, as well as the distinction between resistance and resilience. Given the urgent necessity for adaptation over mitigation, these insights were particularly pertinent.

For emerging researchers and enthusiasts in agriculture like myself, the conference doubled as an invaluable personal development workshop. It stressed the importance of approaching communities and traditional owners with a mindset ready to learn, rather than to 'fix' their problems. Establishing genuine partnerships and valorising indigenous knowledge through co-leadership and co-design were presented as essential strategies for advancing understanding and research in international agricultural contexts.

Overall, the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference expanded my view of the challenges and opportunities ahead and equipped me with the mindset and connections to make a meaningful contribution toward addressing global hunger. Millions of thanks to everyone involved in making my experience at the Crawford Fund Conference truly remarkable.



QUEENSLAND QLD Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Leandra Fernandes, Trevor Volp, Dasuni Dayananda, Megan Moran and Duc Bui were 2024 scholars from Queensland. They are pictured here with QLD Committee members including, Chair Kaye Basford and Coordinator Bob Lawn. Inset scholar Shanice Van Haeften.

Duc Bui, University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC)

Mentor: Daniel Walker

Receiving the scholarship to visit Timor-Leste and subsequently attending the Crawford Conference was a transformative experience that deeply enhanced my academic and professional trajectory. My visit to Timor-Leste provided crucial insights into the local context, which shaped my research on food and nutrition security. The conference offered a valuable opportunity to build on these insights and engage with a broader network of experts and peers.

During my time in Timor-Leste, I engaged directly with local communities and stakeholders, gaining firsthand experience of the region's unique challenges and opportunities. This groundwork was essential for understanding the practical aspects of food and nutrition security and informed my approach to the conference.

The Crawford Conference, themed "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design," was particularly relevant to my work. The keynote sessions highlighted the importance of local involvement in creating sustainable solutions, aligning perfectly with my experiences in Timor-Leste. These insights reinforced the value of co-design and local leadership in addressing food security issues and provided new perspectives that I plan to integrate into my ongoing research.

One of the highlights of the conference was the opportunity to discuss my work with sandalwood species with my mentor, Daniel Walker. Our conversation not only provided valuable feedback but also opened up potential avenues for future collaboration. I expressed my interest in working on an ACIAR project, which aligns with my research goals and could significantly impact my work on sandalwood species. This discussion was pivotal in shaping my future research directions and exploring collaborative opportunities.

Meeting other influential figures, was another key aspect of the conference. Engaging with these experts allowed me to share my findings and receive constructive feedback, further enriching my understanding of the field. The connections made during the conference are already influencing my research approach and opening doors for future collaborations.

The conference's focus on interdisciplinary collaboration was particularly inspiring. Presentations highlighted the need for integrating insights from various disciplines—such as agriculture, health, and social sciences—to address food security comprehensively. This approach has encouraged me to consider how interdisciplinary strategies can enhance the impact of my research on sandalwood species and related projects in Timor-Leste.

The scholars' days provided practical guidance and support tailored to emerging researchers. The workshops on research methodologies, publication strategies, and grant writing were especially beneficial, offering practical tools and strategies that I can apply to my work and future projects.

In summary, the combination of my fieldwork in Timor-Leste and participation in the Crawford Conference has been profoundly beneficial. The insights gained and connections made have significantly enriched my research and professional development. The conference has reinforced the importance of local engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration, shaped my future research directions and paved the way for potential collaborations, including the ACIAR project. This reflection captures the essence of how these experiences have shaped my approach to addressing complex food and nutrition security challenges.

Leandra Fernandes, Griffith University

Mentor: Bob Clements

Attending the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference as a scholar was a transformative experience for me, especially when compared to my previous attendance in 2021 (not as a scholar). This year's theme, "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design," truly resonated with me, particularly the emphasis on partnerships. During the two-and-a-half-day event, I had the opportunity to participate in several activities surrounding the conference and also had the privilege of listening to inspiring speakers from Australia and overseas, who shared their experiences, journey and work in international agriculture.

The interactions I had with the speakers and my mentor during the networking sessions of the conference were invaluable, offering insights on the importance of building long-lasting, meaningful relationships—a sentiment beautifully captured by Sarah Maclean's quote: "The best partnerships aren't dependent on a mere common goal but on a shared path of equality, desire, and no small amount of passion." This idea of shared paths is something I've experienced throughout my PhD, meeting people from diverse backgrounds and forming partnerships that have enriched my research and outlook.

The conference sessions further expanded on this perspective, particularly through the insights shared by Dr Ismahane Eloufi, who stressed the need to listen and learn from local communities, building upon their knowledge and Madonna Thompsons' discussion on leveraging Indigenous knowledge for sustainable and nutritious food systems. Dr. Seesei Molimau-Samasoni's emphasis on working with local champions and investing in the people of the Pacific, alongside fostering cultural and social awareness, was also particularly impactful. Additionally, Prof Hampus Eriksson and Dr Prof Uday Nidumolu's innovative approaches to communicating research findings to farmers showed how enhanced engagement can be achieved, which was both inspiring and practical. Prof Wendy Umberger's focus on gender inclusivity and equity strengthened the need to ensure that our work benefits everyone, regardless of gender.

This is why I didn't feel like there was just one speaker who influenced me; nearly all of them had something valuable to share which I found very inspiring. Overall, this conference highlighted the connections between different aspects—local leadership, cultural awareness, and sustainable practices—emphasising the holistic approach needed in international agriculture.

Beyond the content of the conference, the activities organised by the Crawford Fund and RAID committee offered an incredible opportunity to network with like-minded individuals and experts from around the world. I learned the importance of knocking on every door and looking for opportunities in every nook and corner and, just as crucially, enjoying the journey while making a difference. Being paired with a mentor who listened and helped me realise what I want to do post-Ph.D. and who continues to advise me even after the conference is something I will always be grateful for. Stepping out of my comfort zone is often challenging for me, but conferences like the Crawford Fund help me do just that, and I find myself growing more confident with each opportunity. I believe I have built some long-lasting relationships and made connections with scholars, volunteers, speakers and mentors and I aim to maintain these relationships and those that I will continue to make as I pursue a career in international agricultural development.

Lastly, I would like to thank Bob Lawn, my mentor Bob Clements, the Crawford Fund QLD Committee, Crawford Fund, RAID network and all the funding bodies for this amazing opportunity that brings together passionate young and early career researchers from all walks of life to network and build lasting relationships.

Megan Moran, James Cook University

Mentor: Brendan Rodoni

I am grateful to have attended the 2024 Crawford Fund Annual Conference titled "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design". Drawing on this theme, discussions emphasised the degree to which partnerships, authentic collaborations, and improved project governance can have on the success of developmental research projects and capacity building.

On the night before the conference, I joined the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address and Networking Dinner. This dinner was a special occasion to meet attendees and network before the official conference. The memorial address was given by Dr Line Gordon, Director, Stockholm Resilience Centre, and Professor in Sustainable Food Systems at Stockholm University. In her talk, she highlighted the role of food system transformation in regard to public and planetary health. I found her ambitions to encourage the consumption of locally sourced foods very inspiring.

The conference featured a broad range of experts within the field of food nutrition and security. The morning of the conference focused heavily on the construction of high-quality research partnerships. I especially enjoyed hearing about the partnership between PNG and Australia through the Treaty Village Fruit Fly Trapping Program. Their case study clearly represented how a well-defined partnership can significantly increase the potential for success. They also reinforced a common theme that was present throughout the conference: Quality partnerships should be treated as a two-way street. The impact and integration of meaningful work is only possible through the collaboration and knowledge sharing between local communities and the research partner.

The following sessions further emphasised the same underlying theme. In the next session, I really enjoyed hearing about the work from Ms Madonna Thomson titled "Learnings from Australian Indigenous Projects". She highlighted the nutritional value of native foods as well as their role in the connection to land and cultural identity. Her talk emphasised the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and self-determination into the creation of sustainable food systems, and demonstrated how we could also incorporate these ideals into less developed neighbouring countries.

The conference ended with a lively discussion between Hon John Anderson AC, FTSE, and several of the speakers, nicely summarising common themes brought up throughout the conference. Overall, I found the conference presentations and sessions extremely informative and inspiring. This conference was an invaluable opportunity to engage with my peers as well as leaders in the field.

I would like to genuinely thank my mentor and all the other mentors that took the time to engage with the conference scholars. I believe that the mentorship program really helped bridge the gap between different generations and promoted authentic and productive conversations towards achieving food and nutrition security in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank the Crawford Fund for the opportunity to attend the Crawford Fund Conference and scholars' program, as well as the RAID volunteers for their help with scholar events. As I continue forward in my career, I will always remember the impact this conference had as well as the important lessons that should be carried forward.

Shanice Van Haeften, The University Of Queensland

Mentor: Alison Bentley

As a student scholar at this year's Crawford Fund annual conference, I found myself immersed in a transformative experience that has profoundly impacted my perspective on agricultural research and development. The conference's focus on partnerships, consultation, and collaboration for co-designing and delivering high-quality agricultural research projects resonated deeply with me and challenged me to reflect on my role as a researcher.

The overarching theme that stood out to me was the critical importance of building equal and strong relationships with in-country partners to co-design projects. This approach, as emphasised throughout the conference, enables more effective and impactful research activities that can make a real difference in food and nutrition security. It was a powerful reminder that successful projects are not just about technical innovations but about understanding and working within specific political, social, and institutional contexts. This conference prompted me to reflect deeply on my privilege as a white researcher based in Australia. It highlighted the necessity of truly listening to our partners and recognising the value of local knowledge and systems. I now see more clearly how crucial it is to move beyond the simplistic notion of "training" overseas researchers or farmers to implement Australian methods, and instead foster genuine two-way learning and collaboration.

One of the most impactful aspects of the conference was listening to female leaders in the field, including Dr Ismahane Elouafi, Dr Line Gordon, Karen Mapusua, and Professor Wendy Umberger. Their presentations on achieving transformational outcomes and their reflections on being women in this space were both inspiring and enlightening. Their experiences underscored the importance of diverse perspectives in addressing global agricultural challenges and reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career in this field.

The scholar program significantly enhanced my conference experience. Having a mentor was a major highlight, providing me with invaluable guidance and insights. My mentor's wealth of knowledge and experience not only helped me navigate the conference more effectively but also enabled me to make meaningful connections with other researchers in the field. This mentorship is something I plan to continue benefiting from in the future.

Additionally, the program facilitated networking opportunities with other early-career scientists. Being surrounded by like-minded individuals who share my passion for agricultural research and development was incredibly inspiring and motivating. These connections have expanded my professional network and provided a supportive community as I progress in my career.

This conference has been a turning point in my understanding of agricultural research for development. It has reinforced the importance of co-design, genuine partnerships, and the need to recognise and work within local social and economic systems. Moving forward, I am committed to:

1. Prioritising relationship-building with in-country partners in my research activities.
2. Actively listening to and valuing the perspectives of local stakeholders.
3. Continuously reflecting on my role and privilege as a researcher from Australia.
4. Seeking out opportunities for two-way learning in international collaborations.
5. Maintaining and expanding the network I've built through this conference.

Overall, the Crawford Fund annual conference has not only broadened my knowledge but also deepened my commitment to pursuing impactful, collaborative research in agriculture for development. I am grateful for this experience and excited to apply these insights in my future work, contributing to more effective and equitable agricultural research and development projects.

Trevor Volp, The University of Queensland

Mentor: Phil Brown

This was my first time attending the Crawford Fund conference and it was an enjoyable and enlightening experience. Reflecting on the conference and the two days of 'scholar activities' pre- and post-conference, I was astonished how much information was covered and how many interesting people I met. Interacting with such a diverse array of people was probably my conference highlight. Within the Crawford Scholar cohort there were undergraduates, postgraduates, and post-doctorates from a wide range of backgrounds.

Hearing many of these people's stories, what they are working on, and their career ambitions was incredibly interesting and motivating. At the conference itself there was an even more diverse audience to interact with: mid- and late-career researchers currently running successful research programs or institutes, and many very active retired agricultural researchers. Hearing such a diverse range of perspectives and advice really put things into perspective for me and helped me reflect on my own career ambitions.

This year's conference topic was 'Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design'. Many speakers discussed the importance of research partnerships: how to develop, maintain, and strengthen them. A key message that came through from many speakers was how these relationships underpin everything we are trying to do in international research.

Prof Line Gordon (Stockholm Resilience Centre) provided the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address. I appreciated her broad perspective on the large-scale problems we face, along with the interconnectedness of human health, agri-food systems, and environmental systems. I found the example of the EAT Lancet diet particularly interesting – a diet designed to minimise our environmental impact and provide health benefits, but with apparently limited consumer acceptability. This made me wonder if behavioural science is perhaps a major tool in solving our large global problems.

Dr Ismahane Elouafi (CGIAR) made an interesting point during her presentation that modern agriculture needs much more work to adapt to climate change than smallholder systems, which have been designed to be much more resilient. The comment made me reflect on whether there is an efficiency/resilience trade off in agricultural systems, and whether in Western Agriculture we have spent so long heading towards maximising efficiency, there now needs to be a much greater emphasis on developing resilience.

The final talk I want to mention was Prof. Hampus Eriksson's (WorldFish), where he discussed successful collaborative research conducted at WorldFish. One key point that resonated with me, and many others, was that their research centre is "not capability limited, but resource limited". It appears over the last several decades that funding agencies, research institutes, and governments have done a tremendous job developing capability in agricultural research. We are now well equipped to conduct research to solve the large-scale problems that we are currently facing. But do we have the resources to do it?

I would like to acknowledge the Crawford Fund for funding my participation in the conference and scholar activities, and I'd also like to thank my mentor Phil Brown for the useful advice and productive discussions.

EXTERNALLY SUPPORTED SCHOLARS - Australasian Agricultural & Resource Economics Society (AARES)

Dasuni Dayananda, Griffith University

Mentor: Neil Byron

Attending the Crawford Fund's 2024 Annual Conference in Canberra was an incredibly enriching experience, both personally and professionally. Held from 12-14 August, the conference centered around the theme "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design," which falls under my research interests in agricultural economics and food security. I am very grateful to AARES for supporting me with a scholarship to attend the Crawford Fund Conference 2024 in Canberra.

The conference brought together experts, policymakers, and practitioners from around the world, all focused on addressing the pressing challenges of food and nutrition security. The sessions were not just presentations but lively exchanges of ideas involving both speakers and participants. The conference covered a wide range of topics, but I was particularly attracted to discussions on local leadership and community engagement in developing effective and sustainable solutions. These conversations reinforced the idea that food security is best achieved not only through top-down initiatives but also through meaningful collaboration with those on the ground who understand the local context.

One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to engage with leading figures in the field through the scholar program. Designed specifically for young researchers and early-career professionals, the program included a series of tailored activities that enhanced my conference experience. These activities included pre-and post-conference workshops, where we delved into the complexities of global food systems, and mentoring sessions with seasoned professionals who generously shared their insights and advice.

During this period, I met my mentor, Dr. Neil Byron, who has a strong background in international agricultural development. Dr. Byron provided me with extremely useful advice for both my professional and personal development. Being part of the scholar program also allowed me to connect with other young professionals who, like me, are passionate about making a difference in the field of agricultural development. These connections have already proven invaluable, and we have built a new network of friends. I hope to continue sharing ideas, resources, and support with them in the future. The program's emphasis on networking was evident throughout the event, with numerous opportunities to interact with experts and peers alike.

The experience has left a lasting impact on me, both in terms of the knowledge I gained and the relationships I built. It has broadened my understanding of the multifaceted challenges of food security and provided me with new perspectives on how to approach these issues in my research. Overall, attending the Crawford Fund Annual Conference as a scholar was a transformative experience. It provided me with the opportunity to learn from the best in the field, contribute my own ideas, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the future of food and nutrition security. The insights and connections I gained during the conference will undoubtedly influence my work for years to come.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the conference organising committee, the scholar program organising committee, my mentors, and AARES members. Your support and dedication made it possible for me to participate in this exceptional event and contributed to an experience I will always cherish.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA **SA Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars**



Mackenzie Coopman, Bikram Nepali, Simon Micheltmore and Hayley Grigg (left to right) were our 2024 scholars from South Australia. They are pictured here with SA Committee member John Radcliffe, Roger Wilkes, our SA Committee Coordinator and Kym Anderson, our SA Committee Chair.

Mackenzie Coopman, The University of Adelaide

Mentor: Roger Wickes

Attending the 2024 Crawford Fund Annual Conference has been an enriching experience. The purpose of agriculture seems simple: it aims to feed people. However, despite significant efforts, global agricultural production systems have fallen short of achieving universal food security. While I have yet to complete my undergraduate degree, I have always had some idea of what I wanted to do afterwards. In reflecting on which path to take at the end of this year, I have realised that if nothing else, I want to be able to help others. Attending the Crawford Fund Conference and scholars' event has highlighted that I can achieve this goal in a dynamic and exciting career by contributing to the development of sustainable food production systems through research.

This three-day conference and associated events offered many networking and learning opportunities. As the new representative for the South Australian branch of Researchers in Agriculture for International Development (RAID), I found it invaluable to learn more about the RAID organisation and connect with members of the central committee. The introduction sessions, which delved into RAID's purpose, along with the upbeat quiz night, captured the energetic enthusiasm of the group. I hope to reflect this passion for agricultural research in future SA based events.

Meeting other scholars from across the country was an eye-opening experience. Though few undergraduates attended the events, I was happy to connect with those pursuing postgraduate studies. It was motivating to see where I could be in a few short years. Many conversations I had with fellow students were thought-provoking. For example, while I may not have a personal passion for bugs, I was captivated by discussions with emerging entomologists. It was particularly interesting to learn that, while Australia's modern pest control practices can benefit developing countries, the ingenuity of pest control methods in these countries can offer insightful lessons to Australian farmers.

Engaging with professionals during the networking events and at the conference provided a clear picture of where a career in agricultural research for development could lead. Many attendees were approachable and open to chat about their day-to-day experiences which offered a look at what working in this field might be like. The main conference presentations were delivered by accomplished speakers who explored engaging topics within agricultural development. Some presenters shared compelling case studies, demonstrating how they had applied the conference's theme - Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design - in their work. I was particularly impressed by the nuanced and considered approach of the keynote speakers as they discussed the sector's challenges.

As I begin my career in research, I believe that what I have learnt from the conference will serve me well. I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of collaborative partnerships and cultural awareness as well as acknowledging the value of local knowledge and capacity. I'm excited to share these lessons with my peers and look forward to continuing my journey in agricultural research for development.

Hayley Grigg, University Of Adelaide And Van Schaik's Biogro

Mentor: Colin Chartres

I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference with eye-opening and passionate speakers delving into some of the biggest issues surrounding research and development of global agriculture. It is refreshing to return to addressing the world's problems that do not revolve around the pandemic of COVID-19; problems that we, as scholars and researchers, are likely to encounter in our careers.

This year, the conference was focused on developing relationships with the people we work with, understanding differences in culture and the importance of co-ownership. The great organisational efforts by the Crawford Fund and the RAID Network allow the conference to be tailored to suit all levels of experience with attendees ranging from undergraduate students to retired professionals.

Attending this conference as an Honours student with no previous exposure to international agriculture or to low- and middle-income countries has provided me with an appreciation for the work many of the room are involved in. The diversity of attendees was remarkable having a combined wealth of knowledge and experience from working in many different countries on various projects. Paired with the willingness to share, scholars like myself are given the opportunity to take in as much as we possibly can. These people also possess a broad network to enable connections between scholars and professionals with similar interests. In a room like this, it is impossible to not learn something new.

I do not know what my future will entail, so it was comforting to learn that others also followed a career path that was not well defined, with speakers such as Dr James Quilty transitioning from an IT background, and Dr Steven Ives who became a doctor despite having a trade and never finishing high school.

One key point that carried through the conference, and one that resonated with me was the importance of developing a relationship with the people you work with. Throughout the student activities and during the conference, many speakers talked out the importance of developing this relationship. Co-developed projects are more relevant to the grower and their neighbours. A co-owned project will have results shared in a more effective way. These people are friends not colleagues and you work with them to learn rather than to teach. This skill I can develop now in my current work and carry it with me throughout my career.

I would like to say thank you to the curators of such a well organised and smoothly executed event. Colin Chartres, my mentor, was exceptional with his wealth of knowledge and connections and his sincerity in directing me to make new friends. Other mentors who took me under their wing, including Bob Clements and Tony Gregson, helped me as much as I would expect them to help their own mentee. I should hope that if I ever need direction in life, I could contact these people, and they would be more than willing to help, a positive result from such a well run event.

Simon Michelmore, South Australian Research and Development Institute

Mentor: Ros Gleadow

I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend the 2024 Crawford Fund annual conference and scholar program in Canberra. This conference is regarded as Australia's key food security event, bringing together an incredible, diverse group of delegates from across the country and around the world to share their experiences and expertise in international agricultural development research. As my past research experience has primarily focussed on the Australian grains industry, I was eager to take this opportunity to broaden my understanding of the international development research environment and to gain insights into how my expertise might be applied in the future to benefit the global community.

This year's conference program focussed on the importance of genuine and effective partnerships that prioritise local leadership and co-design of research and development activities for international development. In her keynote address, Dr Ismahane Elouafi showcased recent successes and provided invaluable advice about prioritising equality, as well as cultural and social awareness when working with international partners. Of particular interest, her presentation highlighted opportunities in livestock greenhouse gas emissions reduction and the vast knowledge gap in nutritive bioactive molecules, noting that only 1% of bioactive molecules in food are currently described.

Throughout the day we heard about research projects across the globe, with topics spanning crops, livestock, climate, biosecurity, trade, and policy. For me, the multidisciplinary nature of this community was a refreshing change from the highly specialised nature of many academic conferences.

It was eye-opening to see how the conference themes of partnership and co-design tie together this diverse range of disciplines, and to see the parallels between effective R&D strategies across different cultures and communities.

Something that resonated with me in Dr Uday Nidumolu's talk was that science provides data and information, while communities rely on contextualised knowledge – research for development need both. It occurs to me that the same principles of equality, cultural sensitivity, local leadership, and genuine co-design that make for successful international development research should also guide every area of applied research domestically. Indeed, an inspiring talk was given by Madonna Thomson of the Jagera people, discussing the challenges of developing commercialisation strategies for Australian Aboriginal food systems. Native foods represent a source of drought and climate resilient food production that could provide economic opportunities for indigenous communities, but projects aiming to revitalise these traditional practices must prioritise indigenous self-determination and ownership of traditional knowledge and sustainable food systems to bring profits back to these communities.

As a Crawford Fund Conference Scholar, I had the privilege of participating in a series of networking activities as part of a group of 40 scholars and our incredible volunteer mentors. I was paired with Professor Ros Gleadow, who proved to be a wonderful mentor and provided valuable advice and insights from her own career. During the speed-networking activities, I was able to meet a range of inspiring leaders in international agricultural development and Australian agriculture research.

I am deeply grateful to the Crawford Fund and the South Australian committee for providing me with this experience, and I would highly recommend to other students across every discipline to consider applying for future scholarship programs.

Bikram Nepali, University of Adelaide

Mentor: Rajendra Adhikari

“Attending the Crawford Fund’s Conference Scholar Program was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of global agricultural research and development. The conference brought together diverse experts, researchers, and policymakers, fostering a rich environment for knowledge exchange on pressing agricultural challenges. Engaging in discussions on food security, climate resilience, and sustainable agricultural practices, I gained valuable insights into the need for integrated, interdisciplinary approaches to address these issues.

A key highlight was the mentorship I received from an experienced professional, which provided personalized guidance on research methodologies, career development, and effective policy advocacy. This mentorship helped clarify my career path and inspired me to focus on practical, research-based solutions that address international agricultural development’s scientific and socio-economic aspects.

Networking with like-minded scholars and professionals allowed me to build meaningful connections and explore potential collaborations. This reinforced the importance of combining technological innovation with an understanding of local contexts for sustainable impact.

Overall, the conference was a pivotal moment in my professional journey, equipping me with new perspectives, skills, and a strengthened commitment to advancing sustainable agriculture. I am eager to apply the insights gained to develop impactful strategies that support food security and sustainability in my home region and beyond.”

TASMANIA

TAS Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Phuc Vinh Ngo, Muhammad Zeshan Ahmed, Bharath Dinakaran, Mohitkumar Kumbhani, Grace Campbell, Thuy Duong Nguyen, Trisha Striker, Irhamnie Fawzie (left to right standing) and Apeh Omede (seated left) were our 2024 scholars from Tasmania. They are pictured here with TAS Committee Chair Richard Warner and our TAS Committee Coordinator Neville Mendham.

Muhammad Zeshan Ahmed, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Mark Dieters

Attending the Crawford Fund conference as a scholar was an unexpected and enriching experience for me. This report reflects on my journey at the conference, where I had the chance to connect with industry professionals, learn from esteemed speakers, and explore global food security challenges, sustainable agriculture, and the importance of healthy soils and resilient crops.

One of my early concerns was attending the conference without knowing anyone. However, my mentor, Mark Dieters, provided invaluable support. A week before the event, I reached out to him, and his reassurance, confidence, and deep knowledge of agricultural research helped ease my anxiety. He ensured I felt welcomed and prepared.

The conference’s theme, “Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design,”

was both timely and thought-provoking. We had the privilege of listening to inspiring keynote speakers, including Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Executive Managing Director of CGIAR, whose presentation on CGIAR's role in creating a climate-resilient, hunger-free world was particularly impactful.

A key highlight of the conference was the opportunity to network with fellow scholars, postgraduate students, and industry leaders. These interactions broadened my understanding of agricultural research and development, motivating me to contribute more meaningfully to the field.

As part of my goals for the year, I plan to share my experience with colleagues and encourage their participation in future events. I believe that attending such conferences not only advances professional goals but also plays a crucial role in promoting global food security, protecting biodiversity, and preserving genetic heritage. I am deeply grateful to the Tasmanian Crawford Fund committee for this opportunity.

Grace Campbell, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Helen Scott-Orr

Attending the Crawford Fund's annual conference was a transformative experience that broadened my understanding of the complexities and challenges surrounding global food security. The event was not just a platform for exchanging knowledge but also an opportunity to engage with a community of professionals committed to addressing one of the most pressing issues of our time: ensuring sustainable and equitable food systems.

One of the key benefits I gained from this conference was a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of global food systems. Through various presentations and discussions, it became evident how agricultural practices in one part of the world could have far-reaching impacts on food security in other regions. The emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices, particularly in the context of climate change, resonated with me. I learned about innovative approaches to agriculture that not only increase productivity but also contribute to the preservation of natural resources. This insight has inspired me to explore how these practices can be adapted and implemented in different geographical contexts, particularly in areas vulnerable to climate change.

The conference also highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing food security challenges. I was particularly impressed by the sessions that brought together experts from various fields, including politics, economics, and social sciences, to discuss integrated solutions. The discussions on the role of co-designing research with local champions in different countries were particularly enlightening. Involving such important figures of the focus communities are crucial in achieving meaningful, respectful and lasting impact.

Another highlight of the conference was the emphasis on the social dimensions of food security. The presentations on gender equality and indigenous empowerment were particularly impactful. They underscored the need to consider social equity in agricultural policies and practices. I was moved by the panel of women, in particular Madonna Thomson, and her presentation about the commercialisation of Australian Indigenous food culture and how Australian research and development can learn from Indigenous projects. Madonna's presentation reinforced the importance of supporting marginalised groups in agriculture, as their inclusion is vital for achieving sustainable food systems.

Some key messages I took away from the conference are the need for significantly more funding into agricultural research (and agriculture, more generally), the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, and the critical role of social equity in food security. The conference underscored that achieving global food security is not just about increasing food production but also about ensuring that food systems are resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

The conference has enhanced my understanding of global food security challenges and equipped me with new ideas and approaches to contribute to this field. The event's highlights, including the focus on sustainability and social equity, have inspired me to pursue research and collaboration in international agricultural development. I am now more committed than ever to contributing to efforts that ensure everyone has access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food. A massive thank you to everyone who organised the event!

Bharath Dinakaran, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Stephen Ives

The Crawford Fund Conference, held in Canberra in 2024, was a remarkable event that provided an exceptional platform for knowledge exchange, professional development, and networking with key stakeholders in agriculture, food security, and international development. My participation in this conference, which focuses on critical issues related to global food security, was an invaluable experience that broadened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the agricultural sector and related fields. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference, which was made possible by the support of the Crawford Fund and its partners.

Key Themes and Highlights - The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference centered around the theme of "Innovating for Global Food Security," with an emphasis on the role of science, policy, and partnerships in addressing pressing global challenges. The program featured a range of expert speakers, panel discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities that highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts in ensuring food security for a growing global population.

One of the major highlights of the conference was the keynote address delivered by Dr Line Gordon, an internationally renowned sustainable enthusiast from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and Professor in sustainable food systems at Stockholm University. Her presentation on the future of sustainability and food security was both thought-provoking and

inspiring. She emphasised the need for sustainable practices, the importance of reducing food waste, and the role that cutting-edge technologies such as precision agriculture, biotechnology, and digital platforms can play in increasing food production while minimising environmental impact.

Another standout session was a panel discussion on “Climate Change and Agriculture,” which brought together experts from diverse fields to discuss the impact of climate change on food production systems. The panellists shared valuable perspectives on how climate-smart agriculture can help farmers adapt to changing environmental conditions and mitigate the negative effects of climate variability. I found this session particularly relevant, as it shed light on innovative approaches to building resilient agricultural systems that can withstand the pressures of climate change. It also highlighted the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and local practices into climate adaptation strategies.

A third key theme that resonated with me was the focus on gender equity and social inclusion in agricultural development. Several sessions throughout the conference explored how empowering women and marginalised communities can have a transformative impact on food security outcomes. Speakers emphasised that women, who make up a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce in many developing countries, often face systemic barriers that limit their access to resources, markets, and decision-making processes. By addressing these inequities, the global community can unlock the full potential of agricultural innovation and ensure more equitable development outcomes.

The Scholars’ Program, held on the days preceding the main conference, was an excellent opportunity to engage with other early-career researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from around the world. The workshops and mentoring sessions provided valuable insights into career development, research opportunities, and the practical application of agricultural science to real-world problems. I was particularly impressed by the openness of senior researchers and mentors, who were generous with their time and advice. This experience not only expanded my professional network but also gave me a deeper understanding of the collaborative nature of agricultural research and the importance of partnerships in driving meaningful change.

Networking Opportunities and Professional Connections - One of the most significant benefits of attending the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference was the opportunity to network with industry professionals and leaders in the field of agriculture and food security. In particular, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Stephen Ives, a Senior Teaching Fellow at the University of Tasmania, who is working closely with Vietnam’s smallholder farmers and Australian beef cattle growers through ACIAR’s (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) international agricultural research initiatives.

My conversation with Dr. Ives was an incredibly valuable experience. He shared his insights into sustainable agriculture practices in the context of both Australia and Vietnam. Specifically, his work focuses on improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Vietnam by integrating sustainable cattle farming practices with market access strategies. This resonated deeply with my own research interests in agricultural development and global food security, particularly in terms of how smallholder farmers can benefit from international collaborations.

Through Dr. Ives, I gained a deeper understanding of the importance of international agricultural research in addressing global challenges. He provided me with new perspectives on how agricultural innovations, such as improved breeding techniques and pasture management strategies, can significantly enhance productivity while promoting environmental sustainability. His emphasis on the role of collaboration between Australian and Vietnamese farmers, researchers, and government agencies highlighted the importance of fostering cross-border partnerships to achieve sustainable agricultural development.

In addition to Dr. Stephen Ives, I had the opportunity to meet other delegates working on various projects related to climate-smart agriculture, food systems resilience, and agricultural innovation. These networking sessions enabled me to build meaningful connections with like-minded professionals who share a passion for addressing food security challenges through science and innovation.

The conversations I had with both early-career and senior professionals reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and highlighted how partnerships between academic institutions, governments, NGOs, and the private sector are essential in driving agricultural innovation. The diverse perspectives I encountered at the conference were a reminder of the interconnected nature of global food systems and the need for collective action to tackle the complex challenges we face in agriculture today.

I found the networking sessions to be extremely beneficial. I had the opportunity to meet experts working on agricultural projects in various parts of the world, including regions facing significant food security challenges. These conversations provided me with new ideas and insights that I can apply to my own research and professional practice. Furthermore, I was able to establish connections with potential collaborators and mentors who can provide guidance and support as I continue to develop my career in the field of agriculture and food security.

Irhamnie Fawzie, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Richard Warner

I would like the opportunity to thank the Raid Network and the Crawford Fund granting me the scholarship to attend the conference. This is my reflection on what I have experienced in the three days of my stay in Canberra including scholar activities, networking and the conference itself.

Overall, the whole experience for me was very insightful. I had very little knowledge of what agricultural research is and what it meant to the world. On top of that, I was under the impression that it wasn’t well funded. The conference has introduced me to multiple research-based organisations which are all crucial in developing the agriculture industry not

just in Australia but the Pacific Islands and the rest of the world. During the first day, I was introduced to my mentor who happened to be extremely experienced in the industry from vegetables to berries. I will be sure to use the knowledge he has given me and things he has taught me over the course of three days. He constantly encourages me to develop my options. Currently my career pathway is going towards a three-year degree without honours and working in the agronomy industry. However, the conference and my mentor has showed me what I can do when I enter the research industry of agriculture.

Before the conference we were introduced to multiple speakers including Dr Line Gordon and Dr Seesei Molimau-Samasoni who were remarkable at what they do. They have the most interesting talks and perspectives. The research they are doing in Sweden and the Pacific Islands as to how the agriculture research and nutrition can really change the world if implemented properly is inspiring. I had the wonderful opportunity to connect with them and ask them questions about their area of expertise.

During the conference itself there were many speakers, most of them relevant to solving global food security. While the main focus of the conference is creating transformational partnerships, I found the talks about food security and actual research about new sources of food more interesting. One of the talks was about indigenous people and what they eat for their diet. It was about how grains that are grown by the indigenous people happen to be more nutritious and how it was overshadowed by the local grain industry. The problem is mainly marketing and how macadamia is more popular, hence why it is farmed more. If we were to implement more nutritious grains and make them a commodity, it would certainly make food security better.

There were many more speakers but overall, to me the experience gave me a lot of insights and perspective on how food security can be solved. And that there it is not an easy solution and requires the cooperation and partnership of many different smaller industries so that it is more effective and can be implemented on a broader scale.

Mohitkumar Kumbhani, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Neville Mendham

Attending the Crawford Fund 2024 Annual Conference was an inspiring and transformative experience that has profoundly impacted my academic journey. As a second-year master's student focusing on crop protection, this event resonated deeply with me, igniting a renewed passion for my research.

The conference was a treasure trove of knowledge, offering presentations and panel discussions that spanned a wide array of topics related to agriculture, sustainability, and food security. It was particularly thrilling to witness the insights of renowned scientists who are at the forefront of these fields. One of the standout moments for me was Dr. Uday's presentation, where he effortlessly bridged indigenous cultural knowledge with cutting-edge science. His talk was a powerful reminder of how simple yet innovative ideas can drive meaningful change and foster adaptation in agriculture.

The opportunity to hear from experts across various disciplines highlighted the complexity of global food security issues and reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in finding effective solutions. The conference left me with a deep appreciation for the interconnectedness of our work and the need to approach challenges from multiple perspectives.

Beyond the knowledge gained, the conference also provided invaluable networking opportunities. I was fortunate to engage with fellow researchers and industry professionals at different stages of their careers. These interactions not only broadened my horizons but also opened doors for potential collaborations in the future. The sense of camaraderie among attendees, all united by a shared commitment to alleviating global food insecurity, was truly uplifting.

I am incredibly honoured to have been part of the 2024 Crawford Fund Scholars Program, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to the TAS committee for sponsoring my attendance. I am also deeply grateful to Larissa Mullot and the RAID volunteers for their dedication to organizing such a remarkable event.

As I return to my research, I do so with a renewed sense of purpose and excitement. Knowing that I am part of a global community of researchers striving to make a difference in agriculture and food security fills me with hope and determination for the future."

Phuc Vinh Ngo, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Tony York

After attending the Crawford Fund conference during three wonderful days, I would like to share some reflections about the main topic focused on food and nutrition security. Throughout the conference, I had a transformative experience that has profoundly shaped my perspective on agricultural practices and leadership. The conference provided a unique opportunity to engage with experts, gain insights, and connect with mentors, particularly Tony York, an ACIAR commissioner whose influence has been particularly inspiring. Meeting Tony York was a highlight of the conference. His deep passion for agriculture and food production, combined with his exemplary leadership qualities, left a lasting impression on me. Despite his extensive expertise, Tony's humility and approachability made our discussions both enriching and motivating. He generously shared his knowledge on operating a farm that produces wheat, maize, and livestock, offering practical insights into the production chain. His candid discussion about the challenges of irrigation, especially the effects of climate change on rainfall patterns, highlighted the urgent need for adaptive and innovative solutions. His experiences with these challenges underscored the importance of focusing on sustainable practices and developing strategies to mitigate climate-related risks.

As I am from Vietnam, Tony's past projects in Vietnam resonated with me deeply. This connection fostered a sense of camaraderie and provided additional motivation for me to follow in his footsteps. Tony's mentorship has not only deepened my understanding of agricultural practices but also inspired me to pursue a career path that emphasises leadership, resilience, and innovation in the field of food security.

The conference itself was an eye-opener in many ways. Interacting with numerous experts and speakers from diverse fields, I was struck by their dedication to ensuring global food security. Their relentless efforts to address the pressing issue of food availability and nutrition were both humbling and motivating. I learned valuable lessons about engaging with farmers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, emphasising the importance of leadership, co-ownership, and equity in these interactions. The concept of shared learning and two-way benefit was particularly enlightening, highlighting how empathy and mutual understanding can bridge cultural gaps and foster collaborative solutions.

Additionally, the conference shed light on innovative approaches to reducing food waste and enhancing production efficiency. I gained insights into how research and expertise drive innovations that help manage food resources more effectively, ensuring that nutritional needs are met while minimizing waste. The discussions around recycling food and developing sustainable diets were particularly relevant, as they aligned with the broader goals of achieving food security and sustainability.

In summary, the Crawford Fund Conference was a pivotal experience for me. It provided an invaluable platform for knowledge exchange, professional growth, and networking with experts who share a common passion for advancing food and nutrition security. Tony York's mentorship, in particular, has given me clear guidance and renewed motivation to pursue my goals in agriculture. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn from such distinguished professionals and look forward to applying the insights gained to contribute meaningfully to the field.

Thuy Duong Nguyen, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Glen Weir

Participating in the Crawford Fund 2024 conference as a scholar was a major highlight of my year. Not only did I gain access to the conference, but I also had the opportunity to meet leading professors in the field and an exceptional mentor who expanded my perspective on the broader and more meaningful aspects of working in agriculture.

I was truly impressed by Ms Anastasia Kawi's research on "Partnership through the Treaty Village Fruit Fly Trapping Program: Papua New Guinea and Australia" and Dr Tran Thu Ha's research on "Transformative Partnerships for Transforming Rice Value Chain for Climate Resilient and Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta of Vietnam." Climate change is an urgent issue today and moving towards more sustainable agriculture in the future is crucial. This aligns closely with my current master's study in sustainable agriculture systems. Their work also highlighted the role of women in international agriculture.

The conference provided me with the opportunity to listen to and engage with key figures in the field of food security. It was also a fantastic chance to network with other scholars during the breaks between sessions. As a second-year master's student, I believe the conference offered me a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and greater motivation for my research and career path.

Another significant takeaway was the importance of networking, mentorship, and volunteering. I am grateful to my conference mentor, Glen Weir, for his wisdom and the connections he helped me establish during and after the conference.

The conference also allowed me to learn more about RAID and Australia's volunteer programs. A valuable lesson I learned is that, in addition to enhancing my technical knowledge, I need to develop soft skills such as social communication and public speaking. These soft skills not only improve my ability to communicate and collaborate effectively but also open doors to many other opportunities.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Tasmania and the Crawford Fund Committee for supporting my opportunity to become a conference scholar. This truly has been one of the most wonderful experiences of my year 2024.

Apeh Omede, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Jenny Hanks

A colleague who attended the Crawford Fund Conference in 2023 spoke highly of the conference and how she benefited from both the conference and the scholars program. She encouraged me to apply for the program in 2024. Before this, I have always had interest in international agricultural research for development but one thing lacking was where to start from. So, when I saw this year's conference theme on "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design" and the line-up of speakers, I knew the conference was never-to-be-missed for me.

I applied for the Scholars Program and was thankfully selected by the Crawford Fund TAS Committee. Attending the conference was nothing less than my expectations. It was the right place for me to be. I benefited from the conference and the scholars' program in many ways, including:

- Connecting with my mentor who devoted her time to share ideas about international agricultural research for development with me.
- Meeting like-minded scholars and conference attendees who are working in similar areas and establishing new connections for future collaborations.

- Expanding my knowledge in the space of international agricultural research for development.
- And lots of fun at the RAID event.
- As well, there were really many messages I got from the conference and the scholars' program but there are the ones that I consider key.
- We are all mediocre scientists but when we come together, we can achieve excellent work.
- It is important to see your project collaborators, especially the farmers and people from the local community you work in as project partners and not service providers.
- Acknowledging that local farmers have some knowledge of the systems they have been in, and as such can be learnt from as well.

All the speakers were very amazing. Specifically, Dr Ismahane Elouafi's keynote on "Transformative International Agricultural Research and Development: The road to future success" was very informative and helped me to understand the challenges facing achieving transformational impact in international agricultural research and development and how as researchers, we can navigate those challenges through partnerships, collaboration and co-design. Dr Line Gordon, in her Sir John Crawford Memorial Address challenged me to rethink the issues surrounding building a resilient food system for the growing population without harming our environment.

The most inspiring presentation for me was from Dr Uday Nidumolu's talk on "How do we partner for impact? Communication, Co-design and Outscaling" who showed the scale and depth of the impact that is possible to be achieved when you co-design with the people and give them the freedom to be creative.

Reflecting on the Scholars' program, my major take-away was on key successful factors for international agricultural research for development with particular emphasis on finding your strong inner compass, developing grant writing skills and identifying good mentors and collaborators.

I would like to end this reflection by thanking the Crawford Fund TAS Committee for giving me this opportunity. I left the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference longing to come back again next year and any other year I am able to.

Trisha Striker, University of Tasmania

Mentor: Veronica Doerr

I have been doing work to address the slavery and exploitation of people in supply chains for many years now and had begun to feel stuck and discouraged, sensing that some kind of change was necessary in the way I was approaching the problem and solutions. However, I was not sure where to begin and the idea of text-based research in isolation did not appeal.

It was during this time that I learned about the Crawford Fund Scholarship. I emailed Neville Mendham from the TAS Committee with some questions, and I am grateful that he encouraged me to apply.

I came to the conference with a hope that I would have a better idea of where to orient my future efforts in this field. I also wanted to learn how effective communication, and a justice informed and community led action could increase long-term engagement and inclusivity of projects. The driving force behind my efforts has always been about people, and I was pleased to see the above and more were discussed as crucial ingredients for transformational change.

I was excited to hear Dr Gordon explain that diversity, inclusion and care were core to the mission of the Stockholm Resilience Centre and inspired by Dr Lemerle encouraging the scholars to see ourselves as part of a larger system and to consider what skills we could bring to contribute to a larger goal, rather than working in silos. I was challenged by Prof Samasoni's urging to actively reflect on our privileged status when speaking to people and communities, and to ensure that project outcomes were aligned to the needs of the community, rather than viewing local communities as "service providers" and "sources of data", ultimately reinforcing colonial narratives.

Dr Elouafi's statement about the need for system transformation, and Dr Eriksson's talk on culture inspired a lively discussion amongst scholars about how transformational change in individual and community behaviour can influence the system. Dr Nidumolu's presentation highlighted the effectiveness of community partnerships, communicating "in the same language" and "co design from Day 1".

This made me reflect on the world view and agenda I bring to projects, and how to structure communication so that it doesn't become a barrier to understanding.

I did not know what to expect at the three-day Conference. While the schedule, scholar and speaker bios were interesting, I wondered whether the conference would be more science-based and not being a "hard" scientist myself, that it would be hard to situate my skills and work in the "soft- data" (as discussed by Shaun Coffey) into the field of food security and agricultural development.

However, from the first talk on first day, it became clear that this conference was about people, systems, justice, relationships, co-design and connections for transformational change. Even though the speakers were international experts from diverse fields and backgrounds, the shared theme was about people and communities. Testing ideas with other researchers and scholars was encouraging, inspiring and stretching! I am grateful to the Crawford Fund for this incredible opportunity. I have returned to Tasmania with a better sense of what I need to do to increase the effectiveness of my work, and with a new sense of hope, assurance and excitement knowing that I am now connected into a network of diverse, passionate, hard-working people around the world all working towards a shared goal of a safer, fairer and more just world.

VICTORIA

VIC Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Laura Steel, Luke Molinaro Rathsmann, Russell Woodford, Dylan Male, Emily de Haan and Tessa Consedine (left to right) were our 2024 scholars from Victoria. They are pictured here with Tony Gregson our Victorian Committee Chair and Bill Lewis our VIC Committee Coordinator.

Tessa Consedine, RMIT

Mentor: Wendy Craik

Standing outside as the sun set, casting a warm pink and orange glow over the Parliament House pillars and reflecting off the water, was a moment of quiet reflection after two intense days at the Crawford Fund Annual conference. It was the perfect end to a rewarding and exhausting experience that left me both motivated and inspired.

We participated in various scholar activities and welcome dinner on the first evening of our arrival in Canberra. These provided an excellent opportunity to meet the conference organisers and learn directly from RAID and other key organisations in the field of food and nutrition security. It was incredible to be surrounded by individuals from diverse backgrounds brought together a shared passion for equitable food access. There was an overwhelming sense of community, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing, underscoring the relevance of collective action in tackling global challenges.

The conference itself was exceptionally well-organised with a broad range of speakers who each brought their own valuable perspectives. I particularly enjoyed the mentor-mentee activities which was an invaluable opportunity to network with fellow scholars and seasoned professionals. These interactions were both professionally enriching and personally fulfilling.

In terms of key takeaways, I appreciated Hampus Eriksson's point about the disproportionate impact of agricultural research. He highlighted that only 2% of research in agriculture for development produces high-quality outcomes for small-scale farmers, providing a stark reminder that while everyone has the capacity to contribute, not everyone has the necessary resources. This observation aligns with a broader theme of the conference: the importance of empowering local communities through genuine participation and collaborative program design. As a Global Studies student in development, I resonated deeply with methodologies such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) which allow communities to analyse their own realities and prioritise their needs. More broadly I relished the opportunity to relate my classroom learnings to a tangible context.

I found Madonna Thomson's presentation especially enriching and pertinent, particularly her insights on the potential of native foods like Kakadu plum, finger lime, and wattle seed to support nutrition and preserve cultural identity. She critiqued the food supply chain's dependence on a few grains and advocated for greater diversification. Thomson cautioned against the privatisation of indigenous plants which risks exploiting indigenous knowledge and exacerbating marginalisation, providing a critical reminder of the true meaning of genuine partnerships. Thomson's presentation encapsulated the conference's key themes: genuine participation, collaboration, and amplifying local voices to set priorities and benefit from outcomes. We are called to reflect on power and how knowledge-sharing in agriculture can shift power dynamics to support broader social and political goals. For example, the ongoing fight for recognition of sovereignty in Australia which is particularly pertinent. I'm left with the enduring message: If we can't do it at home, what relevance do our partnerships have elsewhere?

The conference reinforced the critical importance of listening and engaging in a co-exchange of knowledge rather than perpetuating didactic communication that risks reinforcing imperialistic and colonial dynamics. I come away with new knowledge, new ideas, and new connections who will all be part of my ongoing journey in this space. Thank you Crawford Fund for the incredible and enriching opportunity.

Dylan Male, University of Melbourne

Mentor: Tony Gregson

Past participants of the Crawford Fund Conference Scholars program had raved to me about how the event was a career highlight for them, emphasising the value it provided in their early career development. Rest assured; this too was my experience after I was fortunate enough to participate as a 2024 Crawford Fund Conference Scholar.

The Day 1 program kicked off with a gathering of Scholars eager to not only meet each other, but also their designated 'mentor' – someone with a wealth of experience and knowledge in the agriculture sector, who aligned with the Scholars interests and were from the same home states/territories. Through a 'speed dating' exercise, we connected with our mentors in what was no doubt the birthing of many enduring relationships. This was followed by a series of presentations, notably from Dr. Line Gordon of the Stockholm Resilience Centre who delivered a presentation on 'Advancing Science for a liveable planet', speaking to the vision of a 'thriving and resilient biosphere that enables well-being for all' and exploring how people and nature can live and develop on a planet under pressure. We also heard from ACIAR and RAID about careers in international agricultural research for development. The day concluded with the fabulous Sir John Crawford Memorial Address and Networking Dinner, where Dr. Gordon again took the stage and conveyed a deeply thought-provoking keynote talk that had us all captivated and inspired. It was magnificent to look around the room and see fellow scholars networking with their mentors and professionals from a range of disciplines.

On Day 2 the excitement was building as we ventured to Parliament House for Conference Day! Centred around the theme 'Food Nutrition and Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design', the conference was an incredible opportunity to hear from a range of experts and learn from their perspectives on the value of collaboration and local leadership.

I was particularly taken by the presentation delivered by Madonna Thomson, Aboriginal Biocultural Knowledge Holder and Practitioner. Madonna shared invaluable learnings from her experience working on Australian Indigenous projects. A key takeaway from this is that now, more than ever, it is important that our First Nations people play a leading role in food security efforts – and that they receive their fair share of benefits from the agricultural sector which has not been the case in this country post-colonisation. The conference culminated in an incredibly insightful panel discussion from Professor Wendy Umberger (ACIAR), Karen Mapusua (SPC), Dr Line Gordon and Dr Ismahane Elouafi (CGIAR). The day concluded with a Trivia night hosted by RAID, in what was a fun night for all.

Day 3 concluded with a range of scholar activities, including hearing from the New Colombo Plan and Australian Volunteers about opportunities for youth interested in engaging in the Asia Pacific region. We also got to learn a few helpful tips by an experienced journalist on 'getting our stories out there'.

As I reflect on the 2024 Crawford Fund Scholars program, the key highlight for me was the deep invigorating sense of 'Hope' I felt. We all are aware of the complex and 'messy' challenges of which we grapple with as we work towards a more food secure and healthy planet, and yes, there was much discourse on the existential threat posed by anthropogenic climate crisis, destruction of biodiversity and the exceeding of planetary boundaries. Yet, the conference was able to inspire all those who attended. The message was clear - if we work together, we are more than capable as humanity of achieving the very thing so many of us fear we cannot – a food secure and healthy planet where we, and all living things, not only survive but prosper. The conference was not merely a virtue signalling event, but a call to action inviting us to overcome our shared challenge through working together towards solutions. Now, more than ever, I feel hopeful for our future on this planet.

I look forward to staying connected to the networks I have established, and the future collaboration opportunities that arise from them. I express my deep thanks and gratitude to all those who support the Scholars Program, and congratulate you for the delivery of such a high-calibre event.

Laura Steel, La Trobe University

Mentor: John Muir

This year, the Crawford Fund Annual Conference centred on the importance of partnerships, local leadership and co-design for ensuring food and nutrition security. The highlight from the first Scholars' Day was hearing Dr Seesei Molimau-Samasoni speak about designing programs and partnerships for meaningful systems change. The key message was that we need self-reflection and authenticity when learning about and engaging with new cultures. We need to seek to understand the issues people face by asking, listening, and utilising local leadership to build capacity within communities for lasting impact.

The keynote address from Dr Ismahane Elouafi identified four challenges to overcoming food and nutrition insecurity; climate change, funding sustainability, policy and regulation, and equity and inclusivity. Her presentation acknowledged the importance of equitable participation and a shared vision for collaborations between government, institutions, the private sector, and local communities. Co-designing with local stakeholders leads to projects that are socially and practically appropriate, with increased adoption rates and impact. Dr Elouafi emphasised that there is a strong need to promote public and private industry collaborations for additional funding, however, this should be agenda-exempt in order to generate outcomes that result in targeted change for local communities.

The panel featuring Prof. Wendy Umberger, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Dr. Line Gordon and Karen Mapusa was a personal highlight for me, as they provided valuable perspectives on addressing food insecurity in the face of climate change. Dr. Gordon addressed the false dichotomy that we must choose between people or the planet, recognising that alleviating

poverty allows communities to adopt more sustainable solutions, the costs of which are decreasing. The discussion also emphasised the importance of reducing food waste, increasing production, processing and transport efficiency, and embracing the seasonality of food. It was encouraging to see the value of diversity, which was championed throughout the conference, reflected in the panel and across the sessions. This was further evidenced in the support and encouragement that Scholars received from their mentors.

The second Scholars' Day impressed upon me the importance of policy in driving impactful change. Having a framework to support the implementation and adoption of new technologies is just as important as innovation. Sam Coggins reinforced that solutions should be low-cost, co-designed, championed by local leaders and easily adopted, with the practical example of a prematurely developed smart phone application that was quickly discarded in favour of a collaborative solution. He also spoke to the value of acknowledging your personal context in practicing cultural sensitivity and viewing collaborative partnerships as an exchange of knowledge, as opposed to one-way training.

The conference has given me a new appreciation for the value of building networks and nurturing collaborative partnerships. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting many people with intriguing and complimentary research interests. My key takeaway is that meaningful relationships are formed when passionate and openminded people can come together and say, 'This is me. How can I help?'. When we combine our unique skillsets to work together, we can overcome greater challenges and this gives me hope for the future.

Russell Woodford, Monash University

Mentor: Kathy Dibley

The 2024 Crawford Fund Conference on "Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design" provided me with an incredible opportunity to expand my knowledge, networks and insights within the field of sustainable international agriculture in Australia. As a research biologist, I am often isolated from the work that is conducted on the ground in developing nations to help support farmers and ensure food security. However, this year's conference was valuable in enhancing my understanding of the challenges and importance of international agriculture research, as well as the considerations needed when working in this discipline.

The diverse selection of speakers provided a range of perspectives on forming transformative partnerships and collaborations to ensure that research outcomes are effective and maximise the benefit to those that need it the most. I was particularly inspired by the keynote address from Dr Ismahane Elouafi, the Executive Managing Director of CGIAR. Her discussion of the importance of strong collaborative partnerships for addressing the current challenges facing food security highlighted the necessity to use approaches consisting of broad bundles of innovation with realistic, context specific goals rather than single solution pathways performed by single entities. Her talk was optimistic and forward-focussed while equally highlighting the significant effort that will be required to achieve sustainable food security in the decades ahead.

The two half-days of scholar activities associated with the conference also provided me with a unique opportunity to learn additional practical skills needed for international agriculture research. These sessions gave useful insight into breaking into international agriculture research, potential career pathways and opportunities as well as the best practices and approaches for working on the ground in developing countries. I also greatly appreciated the speed networking session in which I got the opportunity to interact with a variety of mentors from different backgrounds, and gather their perspectives on research, food security, and agriculture.

I'd particularly like to thank my mentor, Dr Kathy Dibley for her enthusiasm and interest in my work. We had a number of great discussions surrounding the role of researchers like ourselves in contributing to international agriculture and how we can reconsider our approaches to research so we can be more aware of the needs of those in developing nations and ensure that our laboratory findings can be translated to real-world benefits.

Overall, the 2024 Crawford Fund Conference and associated scholar activities has opened my eyes to the amazing variety of opportunities and support available for international agriculture research in Australia. My interactions and discussions with other scholars and attendees have left me confident that the future of international agriculture development in Australia is strong and have given me a new sense of inspiration for my work. As a PhD student early in my research career, it has given me a new insight into the world of international agriculture research and the great benefits it can bring. I look forward to continuously reflecting on my experience as a Crawford Fund Scholar as I progress with my PhD journey and would like to thank the Crawford Fund for providing me with this great opportunity.

Externally Supported Scholars - The Gardiner Foundation

Emily de Haan, University of Melbourne

Mentor: Bill Lewis

I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to attend this year's Crawford Conference as a Gardiner Foundation Scholar. The conference was an enlightening experience that provided a fantastic opportunity to expand my knowledge on the state of the global agricultural sector and current research and development hotspots. It was a big three days full of networking opportunities and I especially valued the chance to speak one on one with various industry professionals to gain a greater understanding of the various career pathways and opportunities out there.

Being such a broad industry faced with global yet multidisciplinary challenges it can be overwhelming for a university graduate to understand the full extent of the career opportunities and industry needs. We 'don't know what we don't know' and having the opportunity to listen to other people's unique career journeys is a great way to increase our confidence and discover where we can add value to the industry.

After some time to reflect on the conference speakers I have walked away with a deeper understanding on the future challenges the industry is facing, and the strategies that are needed to ensure that we can collectively mobilise the resources we need to steer the industry towards a resilient and sustainable future. This ties in nicely with the theme of this year's conference; transformative partnerships, local leadership and co-design which all rely on enhanced communication and global alignment of goals. This will ensure that the sustainability goals can be achieved, and food security and equity can be achieved. It was surprising to hear that its not the capacity that is limiting development but the mobilisation of resources.

In addition to the conference it was great to be able to connect with the other scholars and the members of the RAID network. I am grateful for the friends and connections I have made during the scholar activities and hope to come across them in my future career. Being surrounded by so many people making huge contributions to the industry has inspired and motivated me to enter into a career where I can add value and assist with overcoming the lack of resources, we need to make a more sustainable food future for all. I feel I am entering into my graduate program at the Commonwealth Bank with an open mind and hope to continue taking opportunities to broaden my mindset in the future.

Luke Molinaro Rathsmann, Melbourne University

Mentor: Greta Stark

The Crawford Fund was an incredible experience which I was so fortunate to attend. Being a scholar at the conference has provided me with so many interesting and eventful future opportunities. The assistance from the mentors made me fit in straight away with special guests, other scholars and mentors. The conference has improved my ability to network, expand my knowledge and ability to engage with the world in Agriculture.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA WA Crawford Fund Committee Supported Scholars



Chaiyya Cooper, Sudarshan Kharel and Jane Brownlee (left to right) were our 2024 scholars from WA. They are pictured here with WA Committee Chair Mark Sweetingham and WA Committee Coordinator Lynette Abbott.

Jane Brownlee, University of Western Australia/CSIRO

Mentor: Leigh Vial

Attending the Crawford Fund Conference was an invaluable experience that provided me with a deeper understanding of global food security challenges and the innovative solutions being implemented to address them. It is an honour to have been chosen as a conference scholar and be offered a unique platform to engage with experts, policymakers, and fellow professionals. The conference and scholar day activities fostered an environment of learning and collaboration around international agricultural research for development.

One of the key benefits I gained from the conference was the opportunity to expand my knowledge on the intersection of agriculture, sustainability, and technology. The diverse range of presentations highlighted the critical role of scientific research and innovation in enhancing food production while ensuring environmental sustainability. This reinforced the importance of integrating cutting-edge technology with traditional farming practices to achieve long-term food security. The conference also emphasised the significance of international collaboration, hearing from speakers who have

successfully implemented cross-border initiatives highlighted that tackling global food security issues requires cooperation across nations and disciplines. This message resonated with me, as it stressed the need for a coordinated global response to food-related challenges.

Some key message I will take with me include Dr. Seesei Molimau-Samasoni talk on the importance of first understanding the social and cultural barriers that are creating gaps that we hope research will address and that reflecting on this is important so we do not reinforce colonial practices and continue to cause harm. Hussein Tadicha Wario's idea to prioritise the understanding of existing local practices and governance processes that exist outside external interventions also resonated with me.

A particular highlight of the conference was the panel discussion on climate change and its impact on agriculture. The insights shared by the panellists illuminated the urgent need for adaptive strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change on food systems. The discussion around climate-resilient crops and sustainable farming practices provided practical examples of how the agricultural sector can adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Another key takeaway was the emphasis on the role of youth in shaping the future of agriculture. The sessions dedicated to young professionals showcased inspiring examples of how the next generation is driving change in the agricultural sector. Presentations from young peers at RAID and ACIAR left us enthusiastic and eager to get more involved. This focus on empowering young leaders reaffirmed my belief in the importance of supporting and mentoring emerging talent in this field.

Overall, the Crawford Fund Conference was a transformative experience that not only broadened my perspective on global food security but also inspired me to contribute more actively to this crucial area. The conference's key messages of innovation, collaboration, and sustainability will continue to guide my work and professional development moving forward.

Finally, I would like to thank my mentor Leigh Vial, the Crawford Fund WA committee, RAID Network, ACIAR, CGIAR and DFAT for creating a good experience and network. I am more committed to global food security and international agriculture research for development.

Chaiyya Cooper, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Mentor: Lynette Abbott

I am truly grateful to The Crawford Fund for sponsoring me to attend the 2024 conference, Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design. Going into this experience, I had few expectations and a limited understanding of The Crawford Fund's work. However, I was pleasantly surprised by how well the scholarship was organised for young researchers and agriculture students, and by how much I learned about the international agricultural research for development being led by Australia.

The conference broadened my perspective on the crucial work being done in Australia to improve food security, not just domestically but also internationally, particularly in developing countries. It was inspiring to see so many dedicated individuals working to solve the food security challenges that I have always been passionate about. Understanding the global impact of this research has given me new insights that will undoubtedly inform my own work in the Western Australian grains industry, helping to improve grain crop yields.

One of the highlights of the conference was the final panel discussion, featuring four inspiring and influential women: Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Dr. Line Gordon, Karen Mapusua, and Professor Wendy Umberger. They discussed achieving transformational outcomes in international agricultural research for development, focusing on Australia's role and the gaps in women's leadership within this field. The panel provided nuanced and thought-provoking insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, particularly the importance of inclusivity and diverse leadership in driving meaningful change.

My favorite part of the scholarship experience was the activities organized by the RAID network, both before and after the conference. These events provided a unique opportunity to connect with the other brilliant scholars from across Australia, as well as the mentors who generously volunteered their time and expertise. The camaraderie and shared passion among the scholars created an environment where we could learn from each other and build lasting professional relationships. I was fortunate to have Lyn Abbott as my mentor during the conference. She played a crucial role in helping me navigate the event, introducing me to key individuals, and advising me on whom to network with based on my interests. The activities also allowed us scholars to engage directly with some of the conference presenters, deepening our understanding of the topics discussed.

One of the most memorable pieces of advice from the conference was about the importance of approaching collaborations as opportunities to learn from others. This was particularly emphasized in the context of Australia partnering with developing nations in the Indo-Pacific region. The point was made that when engaging in these partnerships, it's essential not to adopt a "white savior" mindset, but rather to respect and value the knowledge that collaborators have of their own countries. This advice resonated with me deeply, as it is applicable not only to international collaborations but also to all relationships, both professional and personal. Understanding that every partnership is an opportunity for mutual learning will guide me in my future work, ensuring that I approach all collaborations with humility and openness. Attending The Crawford Fund conference was an invaluable experience that has left a lasting impact on my perspective as a researcher. The insights gained, the connections made, and the inspiration drawn from the event will continue to influence my work as I strive to contribute to the global effort of improving food security.

Sudarshan Kharel, DPIRD

Mentor: Dr Peter Wynn

I had an exceptional opportunity to attend the 2024 Crawford Fund Annual Conference, which revolved around the theme of “Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership and Co-Design”. The conference was an enriching experience, particularly due to the diverse range of research and science communication work being conducted by attendees from developing countries. I was especially inspired by the discussions on innovative approaches to engage with farmers both in Australia and overseas. A key takeaway was the significance of viewing these interactions as opportunities for a two-way exchange of knowledge and ideas, allowing mutual learning to occur.

One of the most compelling sessions was led by Dr Uday Bhaskar Nidumolu from CSIRO, who shared his work on sowing time in India. What stood out was how this research was communicated to farmers through music and song, making it both accessible and engaging. This approach exemplifies the importance of context-specific communication strategies in agriculture, which can bridge the gap between scientific research and practical application.

The conference was overwhelming, given the abundance of exciting developments in agriculture. A crucial lesson I took away was the need to shift our mindset when interacting with farmers, whether in Australia or in developing countries. Often, we approach these encounters with the intent to teach, yet seldom consider the value of learning from the farmers themselves. This reciprocal learning process is something that I believe needs to be emphasised more in our work moving forward. Being part of such a diverse scholar cohort further enriched the experience. I gained valuable insights from fellow scholars, learning about their unique backgrounds and experiences. It was truly inspiring to engage with like-minded individuals who are early in their careers yet so passionately committed to advancing food and nutrition security. These interactions underscored the importance of collaboration and the sharing of knowledge across different regions and disciplines.

Moreover, the conference highlighted the broader responsibilities we carry when communicating with stakeholders. When representing our research, organisation, or even our nation, it is essential to remember that our words and actions reflect more than just our personal perspectives. This awareness is crucial for fostering constructive and respectful dialogues that can lead to meaningful change.

I look forward to attending again and thanks to Em Professor Lyn Abbott for encouraging me to apply for the conference and Adj Professor Peter Wynn for mentoring me.



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