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Growing Transformational Future Livestock Sector Professionals - Emerging Impacts of the ILRI CapDev Grand Challenge

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Abstract

In 2019, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) launched a new initiative, the ‘CapDev Grand Challenge’, an approach to grow cohorts of transformational future livestock sector professionals. The target group is graduate students and researchers from national organisations in LMICs where ILRI works. Annually ILRI hosts about 100 PhD and MSc students embedded within its research programs and co-supervised by professors from degree-awarding universities where the students are registered. Designed to complement graduate research and technical/scientific training, the Challenge process aims at boosting soft skills and systems thinking capability.

The CapDev Grand Challenge covers a 16-to-18-month period, starting with a 3-minute research pitching contest. This is followed by soft skills training involving 10 courses in 10 months, and a deepening phase when participants apply their acquired skills in the workplace, while virtually mentored and supported to attend international conferences. The final activity is a comprehensive impact tracking survey.

This paper presents results from an impact tracking survey conducted in April 2021 on the inaugural CapDev Grand Challenge process involving 71 participants from 24 countries in Eastern, Southern and West Africa and South, East and Southeast Asia.

Over 80% of participants strongly agreed that the CapDev Grand Challenge process broadened their thinking and;

- Boosted their confidence and effectiveness in communicating science to non-technical audiences,
- Strengthened their confidence and ability to engage with intention to influence decision makers,
- Increased their confidence and effectiveness in engaging and working with researchers outside their own discipline,
- Boosted their motivation and confidence to take up leadership roles,
- Made them more knowledgeable, confident and effective in designing and discussing project impact pathways,
- Increased their confidence and effectiveness in mapping out actors in a project, and explaining their roles.

Results demonstrate a strong potential of the Challenge to create systems thinkers, and effective communicators able to contribute, not just new research evidence, but also to development outcomes by deploying scientific evidence to influence decision makers. The process catalyses strategic outreach for impact, thus fostering synergies and sustainability in complex livestock food systems.

Keywords: Capacity development, Livestock sector, next-generation professionals, soft skills, systems thinking, transformational