



Australia Awards

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility

Alumni contributions
to the COVID-19
pandemic response

February 2021



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Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access
COVID-19	2019 novel coronavirus disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GTF	Global Tracer Facility
HPRO	Health Protection and Research Organization
INGO	International non-government organisation
IT	Information technology
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic

NGO	Non-government organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SCB	Scholarships and Alumni Branch
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSW	University of New South Wales
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive Summary

This case study by the Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) explores the extent to which alumni of Australian development scholarships are contributing to the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with a unique snapshot into the type of contributions Australia Awards alumni are making globally during the first 12 months of the pandemic. The report examines findings from eight in-depth interviews and data collected from thousands of alumni as part of the annual Global Tracer Survey in 2020, to showcase the different ways Australia Awards alumni from a range of sectors are using their skills, knowledge and networks developed on award in Australia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alumni contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic response

Using data from the Global Tracer Survey 2020, the GTF has identified that almost half of Australia's development scholarship alumni have contributed to a local or global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three main types of COVID-19 pandemic responses of alumni identified are:

- those delivering frontline services (**first responders**—medical and mental health workers and those involved in quality vaccine production)
- those working in **secondary response** (supporting policies through communications, information technology (IT) support and education)
- **policy and intergovernmental response** (those working in high-level decision-making and the creation of policies related to the COVID-19 response).

The eight alumni interviewed (4 women, 4 men) are making significant contributions to the COVID-19 response in their country, region and globally in areas such as:

- public health management, emergency response, and equitable vaccine dissemination
- frontline mental health services
- delivery of essential medical services including maternal and neonatal care, reproductive health and support for sexual assault and gender-based violence
- inclusive public health education campaigns
- delivery of accessible education programs to pre-school and school aged children
- quality assurance and distribution of vaccines
- monitoring and evaluation of intergovernmental responses to COVID-19.

Skills and knowledge developed on award and used in the COVID-19 response

Alumni identified a mixture of discipline-specific **technical knowledge** and three broad soft skills; **communication, leadership**, and **intercultural competencies skills** which they developed on award as being **integral** to their ability to contribute to the COVID-19 response.

Alumni attribute Australian expertise, and the quality of teaching and learning they experienced on award as providing them with a strong technical knowledge. They also identified the deep insight into the practical applications of this knowledge provided in their Australian courses through real world examples such as case studies, group work, internships or industry-based projects, analysis of data and report writing. This combination of skills and knowledge has given them 'confidence' and the ability to adapt practices to address the challenges caused by COVID-19.

Networks and collaboration contributing to alumni response

It is important to note, that in the context of this case study, evidence of alumni using networks developed in Australia to contribute to COVID-19 responses are relatively limited. However, the report identified strong formal institutional ties and close collaboration on COVID-19 research between the World Health Organisation and Australian universities, which is being strengthened by a former Australia Awards alumna in a senior leadership position. Alumni reported they were interacting with friends, lecturers, and classmates they met in Australia in informal 'communities of practice' on social media during the pandemic to share ideas, improve practice and to provide wellbeing support to each other.



Global Tracer Facility

Australia Awards alumni are contributing to the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Australia Awards alumni are contributing to:



emergency public health response, and equitable vaccine dissemination



inclusive public health campaigns



frontline medical and mental health services



accessible education programs for children

Australia Awards alumni outcomes

Alumni provided strong examples of contributions to the pandemic response



“I also took on the role as the World Health Organisation's Acting Director for Emergency Response in the Western Pacific Region, and I was the key person to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in our region for 9 months.”



Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries



“My supervisor, who's in Melbourne, I'm closely in touch with her and seek supervision when I have issues or when I'm stuck. It has definitely contributed in this COVID time.”



Alumni view Australia and Australian expertise positively



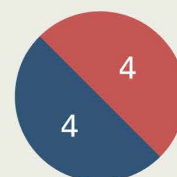
“Every step I'm taking right now in terms of my job and learning, it's because of the influence of my Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy) I did in Australia. I'm a bit biased about Australia.”



Participants

Interviews with **8** Alumni who completed scholarships between **1999** and **2017** and data from **6,221** alumni who participated in the Global Tracer Survey in **2020**.

Case study participants:



■ female alumni
■ male alumni

1. Introduction

This case study by the Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) provides the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with a unique snapshot into the type of contributions Australia Awards alumni are making globally during the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report examines findings from eight in-depth interviews and data collected as part of the Global Tracer Survey in 2020, to showcase the different ways Australia Awards alumni from a range of sectors are using their skills, knowledge and networks developed on award in Australia to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1 Objectives

The focus of the GTF is to collect and analyse information from alumni to assist the Scholarships and Alumni Branch (SCB) of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to better understand the long-term outcomes of Australian Development scholarship alumni. This particular case study has been undertaken to increase evidence and knowledge about how alumni of Australian development scholarships are working to contribute during the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three overarching aims of this case study are:

- a) to articulate different types of alumni contributions as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- b) to identify skills and knowledge developed on award which have enabled alumni to respond effectively to challenges caused by the pandemic.
- c) to understand the way in which connections and networks developed while on award have been maintained and have facilitated alumni contributions as part of the COVID-19 response.

In addition to these specific aims, research by the GTF is intended to provide insight and evidence into the overall objective of Australia Awards: to help 'partner countries progress their development goals and have positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests', as well as the four long-term outcomes outlined in the Australia Awards Global Strategy¹ and Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.² These long-term outcomes are:

Outcome 1: Alumni are using their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.

Outcome 2: Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

Outcome 3: Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries.

Outcome 4: Alumni view Australia, Australians, and Australian expertise positively.

¹ For further information: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-awards-global-strategy.pdf>

² For further information: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-awards-global-monitoring-evaluation-framework.pdf>

1.2 Scope

For this case study the research focus is on Alumni contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic response from February 2020 to February 2021. The research includes examples of alumni from three broad areas: those delivering frontline services (medical and mental health workers and vaccine production), those working in secondary response (supporting policies through communications, media, information technology (IT) support and education) and policy and intergovernmental response (those working in high-level decision-making and the creation of policies related to the COVID-19 response).

Alumni featured in this case study were identified from data collected in November and December 2020 as part of the annual Global Tracer Survey.

1.3 Alumni interview participants

Eight alumni were interviewed for this case study and shared their experiences responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in their work. The questions that guided the interviews with these alumni can be seen in Annex 3. Further detail relating to each alum can be found in the 'Alumni profiles' section later in the report.



Dr Osayande Ehigie Osagie—Nigeria

Australian Development Scholarship

Master of Public Health, University of Melbourne

Medical Director, Chief Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the General Hospital Bwari, Abuja, Nigeria



Ms Kajal Shrestha—Nepal

Australian Development Scholarship

Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy), Curtin University of Technology

Product Quality Manager, Sanofi Pasteur, Canada



Ms Sangay Choden Namgyel—Bhutan

Australian Development Scholarship

Master of Counselling, University of Queensland

Program Leader and Lecturer, Clinical Counselling, Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan



Dr Tran Thi Giang Huong—Vietnam

Australian Development Scholarship

Master of Public Health, University of New South Wales

Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, World Health Organisation (WHO) for the Western Pacific Region, Manila



**Dr Ghulam Farooq Mansoor
—Afghanistan**

Australian Leadership Award

Master of Public Health,
University of Queensland

General Director of the
Health Protection and
Research Organization
(HPRO), Afghanistan



**Mr Tabongphet Phouthavong
—People's Democratic
Republic of Lao**

Australian Development
Scholarship

Master of Arts
(Communications—Journalism),
Charles Sturt University, Bathurst

Communication Specialist,
UNICEF Lao PDR



**Ms Caren Chizuni
Wamundila —Zambia**

Australian Development
Scholarship

Master of Nursing, Monash
University

Chief Safe Motherhood Officer,
Reproductive Health Unit,
Ministry of Health, Zambia



**Mr Luke Petai—Papua New
Guinea**

Australia Awards Scholarship

Master of Applied
Anthropology and Participatory
Development, Australian
National University

Social Development Specialist,
Rural Service Delivery of
Projects, World Bank and
Education Consultant,
Education Emergency
Response and Recovery Plan,
UNICEF, PNG

2. Alumni contributions to the COVID-19 response

The case study demonstrates the impact alumni can collectively make in response to a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, through the utilisation of skills, knowledge and networks made on award. Alumni featured in the case study have made significant development contributions during the first year of the pandemic through a range of fields including public health programming, emergency response and vaccine dissemination, media and communications, medical and mental health services, education and training, and monitoring and evaluation.

2.1 Introduction

The outbreak of the 2019 novel coronavirus disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (COVID-19) was first detected in Wuhan, China in late December 2019, and rapidly spread around the globe in early 2020. COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020 and has since dramatically impacted the way we live and work. There has been significant economic and social disruption across the globe as countries struggled to control the spread of the virus, and deal with rising numbers of infections and deaths.

This chapter highlights the scale and types of COVID-19 responses of Australia Awards alumni during the first year of the pandemic. It combines findings from the 2020 Global Tracer Survey and in-depth interviews with eight alumni. The evidence provided below shows that for the alumni in this case study and those involved in the survey, long-term Outcome 1 of the Australia Awards is being **achieved**.

2.2 Alumni contributing to the response: Survey outcomes

The Global Tracer Survey, undertaken in November to December 2020 provided the GTF a unique opportunity to collect specific data relating to the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on alumni, their workplaces and their contributions through several tailored questions. Responses were received from over 6200 alumni with nearly half of respondents saying they were directly involved in the response (47 per cent). When looking at the profile of alumni contributing to the COVID-19 response, male alumni were marginally more likely to be involved in the response, with 52 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women. Those in formal and informal leadership positions at work were also more likely to have contributed to the COVID-19 response (52%) compared with those that were not in leadership positions (30%).

When looking in more detail at the alumni making these contributions, those who worked for non-government organisations (NGOs) and multilateral organisations were very much involved in the COVID-19 response, with nearly 60 per cent of respondents from each sector indicating they have undertaken work relating to the pandemic. Over half the respondents in the public sector were also contributing, while a much smaller proportion of alumni employed in the private sector were directly involved (35%) in the COVID-19 response. As expected, a larger proportion of alumni who studied in a health field stated they were directly involved in pandemic-related work in the past 12 months (61%). Half of the alumni who studied within the humanities and social sciences (e.g. politics, law, etc.), architecture, and IT fields also reported being involved in the COVID-19 response.

The findings of the survey showed three main ways in which alumni were involved in the response: first responders (frontline workers), secondary responders (workers supporting the roll out of policies or intergovernmental responses) and those involved in policy and intergovernmental responses (high level decision makers and policy designers). Over half of survey respondents were considered secondary responders, with around one in ten respondents identified as a first responder, and around one in six respondents were involved in high level policy and intergovernmental responses.

Snapshot of COVID-19 alumni responses

46.8% of alumni responding to the 2020 Global Tracer Survey* have been involved in the COVID-19 response efforts.

COVID-19 Responders



Which alumni are making contributions to the COVID-19 response?

- 52%** of male alumni and **42%** of female alumnae
- 56%** of alumni in leadership positions
- 61%** of alumni who studied health
- 60%** of alumni who work for an NGO
- 58%** of alumni who work in a multilateral organisation
- 53%** of alumni who work in the public sector
- 35%** of alumni who work in the private sector

Types of Responders



1 in 10 alumni were **first responders** (frontline workers)



Over half of those involved in the COVID-19 response were considered **secondary responders** (those supporting COVID response efforts)



One in six were **policy and intergovernmental responders** (high level decision makers and policy designers)

Kind of tasks alumni undertook in the response to COVID-19 in their workplaces:



1/4 of alumni tasks were policy and planning, or development work

3% were supplying logistical and IT support

1 in 7 alumni were contributing to scientific or medical development or assistance

*The 2020 Global Tracer Survey collected data from 6,221 alumni of Australia Awards and predecessor scholarships in November and December 2020.

The survey also asked alumni about the kind of tasks they undertook in the response. Of the alumni that responded:

- over a quarter of alumni respondents' tasks were policy and planning or development work
- one quarter were providing education, awareness, or communication about COVID-19
- around one in seven alumni respondents were contributing to the scientific or medical development or assistance to the COVID-19 response
- a small number of respondents also provided logistical and IT support during the COVID-19 response.

2.3 Examples of contributions—eight alumni and their impact

To drill into the data further, the GTF identified eight alumni from the survey results and undertook in-depth interviews to understand the unique contributions Australia Awards alumni are making across the globe in response to COVID-19. This section provides specific detail and evidence of the different types of work being done by Australian development scholarship alumni from Africa, East Asia, South and West Asia and the Pacific, and showcases their contributions in response to the pandemic during the first year. These alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks developed on award to make significant contributions in areas such as:

- global public health management, emergency response, and equitable vaccine dissemination
- frontline mental health services
- delivery of essential medical services including maternal and neonatal care, reproductive health and support for sexual assault and gender-based violence
- inclusive public health education campaigns
- delivery of accessible education programs to pre-school and school aged children
- quality assurance and distribution of vaccines
- monitoring and evaluation of responses to COVID-19.

It is important to note that although the section below focuses on alumni contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic, alumni featured in this case study are each making broader contributions to sustainable development in their fields. Data collected from the interviews found that alumni are achieving the Australia Awards long-term Outcome 1: 'Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development' in areas such as:

- **capacity building**—sharing of knowledge and skills gained on award through formal education and training programs, collaborative research, and mentoring of colleagues, development partners and community members
- **improved practices**—in maternal and child health care and nutrition, hospital administration, and education and training
- **mental health services, training and advocacy**
- **evidence based public health policy and emergency response preparedness**
- pharmaceutical **quality control**
- **inclusive** development programming and evaluation.

The following section details the contributions of the eight alumni interviewed for this case study. These contributions are detailed in relation to the three broad types of response categories that the GTF has identified: first responders, secondary responders and policy and intergovernmental response coordinators.

2.3.1 First responders

For the purposes of this case study, a first responder is considered as a person who is on the frontline of the COVID-19 response; their work is directly involved with the containment of the virus and the safety of the community. Alumni considered to be first responders work in roles such as nurses, doctors, mental health workers, pathology, contact tracing, and vaccine development. The GTF's Global Tracer Survey of alumni in 2020 indicated that about one in ten alumni who are involved in the response to COVID-19 in their country or region are 'first' or 'frontline' responders. Three of the alumni interviewed in this case study fit into this general category, and the contributions outlined below provide insight into the roles that alumni are playing in the first line of defence in relation to the pandemic.

As the Medical Director of the Bwari General Hospital and specialist medical practitioner, **Dr Osayande Ehigie Osagie** is working as a frontline doctor and hospital administrator in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. An Australian Development scholarship alumnus, Dr Osagie studied a Master of Public Health at the University of Melbourne (2008-2009) and is now leading the hospital's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Osagie implemented strict public health protocols across the hospital at the start of the pandemic to minimise the spread of the virus, employing measures such as mandatory mask wearing, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitising. He provided first responder training for all staff to minimise misinformation and fear about the virus and established strict protocols around patient treatment including using separate treatment rooms for suspected COVID-19 patients. This limited the impact of the second wave on the hospital and allowed vital services to remain open when other hospitals in Abuja had to close.

We as a facility had taken the decision that anybody: staff, patient or patient's relations that enters this facility must wear a face mask... by the time this second wave started, most of our facilities had closed down some units because of staff infection... I have not had to close down any unit since the second wave started because we never relented [on our approach to masks, hand hygiene and PPE].



Generic public health campaign poster used to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Image: Shutterstock 2020

Further to the strict application of these public health protocols, Dr Osagie also contributed to the response to other issues occurring in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. In reaction to the steep rise in sexual assault and family violence in the community during the first two lockdowns, Dr Osagie worked closely with the British Council to set up a free Sexual Assault Reference Centre within the hospital. The centre provides integrated medical services, counselling, and mental health support for victims of sexual violence and supports the prosecution of perpetrators.

We gave the [British Council] a two-bedroom bungalow within the hospital facility... They came, they renovated it, everything stocked, and we posted the staff there. On the 25th of November [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women³] it was commissioned.

Working in the frontline of mental health training and advocacy in Bhutan is **Ms Sangay Choden Namgyel**, a mental health academic and trained counsellor. Ms Namgyel undertook an Australian Development scholarship and studied a Master of Counselling at the University of Queensland (2013 to 2014) and has played a crucial role in providing technical advice and support to the Bhutanese Ministry of Health's response to COVID-19 through her work as a member of the National Mental Health Response Team.

The Mental Health Response Team was formed in March 2020 to help coordinate a national response to the mental health impact of the pandemic on the population. Ms Namgyel has been involved in providing expertise in frontline crisis management and psychosocial counselling services, as well as training for 'volunteers, front liners on psychological first aid.' The team set up a national telephone hotline service to provide 'mental health support for people' suffering during the prolonged lockdowns and set up standard operating procedures to administer mental health support during the pandemic. Ms Namgyel noted

People call in for various reasons... Most had activation of old mental health issues, in addition to substance use issues, and violence.



Promotional flyer advertising a webinar on mental health and psychological first aid during lockdown in Bhutan featuring Ms Sangay Namgyel (left). Image: <https://bhutan.un.org/>

In addition to providing triage counselling, Ms Namgyel and her colleagues have produced training webinars for front line service providers to increase their capacity to deal with patients presenting with mental health issues during the pandemic. These webinars provide training in psychological first aid while also promoting awareness of mental illness in Bhutan. As highlighted by Ms Namgyel:

The National Mental Health Response Team, have at least three webinars in a week, which we are doing on a voluntary basis... I am particularly doing Friday webinars for all the counsellors in the country. I am the focal person for that, and I do various topics that can be beneficial for counsellors in the country. And of course, the webinar is an open forum for people to also join and learn about mental health, learn about domestic violence, learn about substance abuse and then about the treatment for all this.

3 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 25 November 2020. UNITE-United Nations Secretary – General's campaign to End violence against women <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

Another alumna making a ‘front-line’ contribution to the global COVID-19 response is **Ms Kajal Shrestha** from Nepal, who studied a Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy) at Curtin University from 2008 to 2009 as part of an Australian Development scholarship. As an essential worker based in Canada, Ms Shrestha is involved in ensuring the production and distribution of quality medicines and vaccines for the large multinational, Sanofi Pasteur. The company develops a broad range of vaccines used in immunization programs across the globe.

Ms Shrestha is responsible for quality assurance of pharmaceuticals before distribution and works in the filling and packaging department. The role requires detailed knowledge of global regulations to ensure products meet set country-specific standards and can be distributed to various locations across the globe.

Having a continuous supply of vaccines in a time of pandemic is important, so that we don't have any other outbreaks... I am part of the quality, so there are so many areas where we review the documents and all the quality aspects, we take care of. And I'm really proud of the things I'm doing.

2.3.2 Secondary responders

Secondary responders are alumni who are not involved in the ‘frontline’ response to COVID-19 but are adapting to new situations and ways of working or are working to provide support and infrastructure to the community. This includes education, communications and media. The majority of alumni who were surveyed in the GTF's Global Tracer Survey in 2020 and were involved in COVID-19 responses, fit into this ‘secondary responders’ category. Many of these secondary responder alumni work within the public sector. The examples of alumni interviewed for this case study demonstrate alumni contributions in communications, media, and education.

As a Communication Specialist working for UNICEF in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), **Mr Tabongphet Phouthavong**, is involved in the development and implementation of COVID-19 communication materials as part of the public health education campaign. Mr Phouthavong received an Australian Development scholarship and studied a Master of Arts (Communications - Journalism) at Charles Sturt University (1998 to 1999) and has worked in communications at UNICEF for over 21 years.



The Laos Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) and UNICEF launched a new Early Childhood Development (ECD) TV series aimed at young children which integrates messages around COVID-19 prevention and control. Photo: UNICEF Laos/2020/Saykoson <https://www.unicef.org/laos/press-releases/new-early-childhood-development-tv-series-launched-support-government-japan>

During the last year, Mr Phouthavong has worked closely with a range of stakeholders including UN agencies and the WHO, to develop clear and inclusive messaging as part of the COVID-19 public health campaign in Lao PDR. A member of the National Taskforce Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control, Mr Phouthavong collaborates with government departments, media outlets and other international agencies to ensure that public health information can ‘reach the most vulnerable people’ and that the communication materials are ‘simple and easy to understand and translate into ethnic languages.’

Since people in far rural areas have limited access to information, TV and radio, our communication team also recommended UNICEF to provide community loudspeakers system as tools to provide information to people.

In response to lockdown and school closures, Mr Phouthavong provided technical expertise to the Lao PDR Government, and collaborated with a number of ministries to develop and produce two television shows to provide learning materials to children stuck at home. He led the production of “My Village” for pre-school children, and “My House” to promote home schooling for older children. When the lockdown ended, he also produced the “Safely Back to School” media campaign to promote COVID-19 safe practices for school children.

After identifying gaps in technical capacity, Mr Phouthavong sought funding and was able to procure new communications equipment for government partners and Lao PDR media outlets through UNICEF, to support their capacity to communicate internally as well as with international partners during the pandemic.

Since the Lao [PDR] Government has limited funding, I discussed with our communication colleagues on the possibility to capacity build and provide new IT equipment such as teleconference equipment. As result, UNICEF has supported our key Government partners such as Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, key media outlets and other related ministers with new affordable communication technology.

Mr Luke Petai, an alumnus from Papua New Guinea (PNG), studied a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development at the Australian National University (2016 to 2017). Through his work as a development consultant, he is contributing to the COVID-19 response in PNG by providing technical support on online survey and questionnaire design to the National Department of Education as part of the UNICEF (PNG), COVID-19 Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan. Mr Petai is supporting the monitoring and evaluation of the plan’s targeted responses and collecting valuable data on the effects of school closures, and remote learning on school aged children across PNG.

In addition to his work in the education sector, Mr Petai is also working as a Social Development Specialist for the World Bank’s Rural Services Delivery Project. The project contributes to educating rural communities about COVID-19 through embedding public health information as part of its activities. Mr Petai’s role is to support the project management unit at the Department of Provincial and Local Government to roll out the collaborative infrastructure building project to five provinces.

We carry out a lot of community meetings in the project localities, especially wards, we ensure that our satellite offices understand what’s going to happen...we make sure that when we go, we carry out awareness and support before going into connecting our activities, and people are encouraged to wear masks...

2.3.3 Policy and inter-governmental response coordination

Alumni who are involved in policy and inter-governmental response coordination are those involved in high-level decision-making and the creation of policies related to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This can include the introduction of policies around public health and the vaccine rollout coordination. In many cases alumni with these kinds of roles are working for governments or international non-government organisations (INGOs) such as UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO). In the Global Tracer Survey, undertaken in late 2020 by the GTF, nearly one in five of alumni indicating involvement in responses to the pandemic were in a role that fits this type of response. The detailed examples from the case study interviews below provide some indication of the specific work and contribution of Australian development scholarship alumni are making at a local, national and global level in response to issues arising from COVID-19.

A significant example of this is **Dr Tran Thi Giang Huong**, an alumna from Vietnam, who studied a Master of Public Health at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and several electives at the University of Sydney (1999-2001) as part of an Australian Development scholarship. Dr Tran worked as a senior public health official for the Ministry of Health in Vietnam for over 25 years and completed a doctoral degree Public Health in 2009. In July 2019, she joined the team at the WHO as the Director for the Programmes for Disease Control for the Western Pacific Region and her division is responsible for six technical units 'covering different technical areas, including communicable diseases and non-communicable diseases and mental health'.

I am now responsible for disease control programmes in 37 countries and areas in the Western Pacific region. This region consists of 1.9 billion people, and Australia is a member state belonging to this region. We also have other countries including China, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, seven Asian countries and 15 Pacific Island Countries. My portfolio now involves working on all the disease control programmes of the World Health Organisation. I was the first Vietnamese woman who was appointed to this position.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China in early 2020, Dr Tran took on the additional role of Acting Regional Emergency Director and coordinated the initial emergency response in the region from January to October 2020. She worked closely with member states to 'suppress and contain the pandemic' so that 'health systems would not be overwhelmed,' using public health measures such as education campaigns, restrictions and community compliance, mask wearing, social distancing, and contact tracing.

We are very proud to say that among the WHO regions, the Western Pacific region has the lowest number of cases and lowest number of deaths due to COVID-19, and most of the countries in our region are working so well to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao [PDR], Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand.

Dr Tran established daily briefings with focal points for each country in the region and established 'an Incident Management System to connect all the countries and share information on the pandemic' daily. Examples of best practice were shared across all regions, as well as lessons learnt from previous pandemic experience.

In October 2020, Dr Tran was asked to lead the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in the Western Pacific region. She is now coordinating the COVID -19 Vaccine Working Group, supporting member states in the region to develop national deployment plans of the vaccine. As part of this work Dr Tran is actively involved in ensuring fair and equitable distribution of the vaccine across the region in collaboration with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Gavi (Vaccine Alliance) and UNICEF as part of the COVAX Facility.

We need to make sure that the countries in our region, especially the low-income countries... and the Pacific Island Countries can have access to the vaccine... Under COVAX, we now try to negotiate with the donors and try to negotiate with the manufacturers to ensure that in 2021, we can have access to 2 billion doses of vaccine for the participating countries.



COVAX vaccine roll-out- 24,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine arrive in the Solomon Islands March 2021. Photo: <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility>

Dr Ghulam Farooq Mansoor, an Australian Leadership Award alumnus, has been involved in evaluating policy responses to COVID-19. As part of his award, Dr Mansoor studied a Master of Public Health at the University of Queensland (2008 to 2009). A physician and public health expert, Dr Mansoor has had an extensive career working on public health initiatives in Afghanistan including the eradication of polio, and improvements in maternal and child health and nutrition.

Currently working as a public health consultant and the General Director in Afghanistan's Health Protection and Research Organization (HPRO), Dr Mansoor splits his time between different projects. He is actively involved in providing capacity building to government partners through his work as the Research Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Director for the USAID Initiative for Hygiene Sanitation and Nutrition.

As part of the COVID-19 response, he has been involved in the evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) support to the Ministry of the Interior in Afghanistan to reduce the spread of COVID-19 amongst the National Police Force. As part of the evaluation, Dr Mansoor is providing information to UNDP on the uptake of COVID-19 safe practices among the police force across the 34 provinces. This includes collecting data relating to the use of specialised donated hygiene kits among members of the National Police Force.

Dr Mansoor is also monitoring the deployment and use of medical equipment in the seven specialised COVID-19 hospitals which were set up to support the police force during the pandemic.

There were some allegations with the peak of COVID, that when some equipment was donated by some countries, some were alleged to have been taken to Pakistan by some fraudulent people instead of being used in our hospitals... We are serving a very crucial purpose with this monitoring. We visit the hospitals first to verify that all the equipment has arrived and is functioning and then if the staff are able to use it.

Further to these contributions, in preparation for the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in March and April 2020, Dr Mansoor was asked to undertake a formative study for UNICEF to investigate attitudes among the Afghan community towards the COVID vaccine. The aim of the study is to inform UNICEF's communications strategy for the roll-out of the vaccine and target education campaigns to groups who may be sceptical about the vaccine.

Another example of an alum working on the policy-development aspects of COVID-19 responses is Zambian alumna **Ms Caren Chizuni Wamundila**. Ms Wamundila received an Australian Development scholarship and studied a Master of Nursing at Monash University from 2013 to 2014. As the Chief Safe Motherhood Officer at the Ministry of Health, Ms Wamundila is responsible for maternal and neonatal health activities across Zambia. Her role involves working closely with UN agencies and partners to support safe motherhood practices through integrated reproductive health services, health policy and guidelines, training, surveillance, and responses to maternal and perinatal deaths.

A critical role Ms Wamundila has played in Zambia's response to COVID-19 is to spearhead the development of new Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child and Adolescent Health & Nutrition guidelines. These guidelines were a necessary measure to address a decline in attendance and delivery of reproductive services and safe antenatal and postnatal care that occurred in Zambia as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines were designed to ensure that essential services remained open, accessible, and safe for women during the pandemic. Ms Wamundila's work helps to reduce maternal and child mortality, while also providing integrated services on a single site to ensure women and girls in Zambia have continued access to family planning, HIV and STD testing, safe abortions, and support from family violence. She highlighted that the work done by her team is designed to:

Help the providers emphasise that despite being amidst COVID, women and children should be able to access services.

Ms Wamundila is also responsible for ensuring the curriculum for midwives and maternal healthcare nurses provides adequate training in a post-COVID world. She is now looking to Australia to see how Australian universities are incorporating COVID training into the curriculum and she hopes to do the same in Zambia.

We are looking at the curriculum under the Australia Awards universities, they are also looking at incorporating COVID in the curriculum for both the undergraduate as well as the post-graduate level because it's something that is going to be with us for some time.

3. Utilising Skills, Knowledge and Networks from Australia in response to COVID-19

Alumni interviewed as part of the case study identified specific skills and knowledge gained on award in Australia as providing them with the confidence, technical expertise, and improved interpersonal skills to effectively respond to the challenges caused by the pandemic in their field of work. Many alumni spoke of remaining connected to friends, classmates, lecturers, and experts they met on award through social media. During the initial phase of the pandemic, these alumni were able to use these informal networks to form ‘communities of practice’ to share ideas, challenges and best practice field responses to the COVID-19 pandemic while also providing wellbeing support to one another.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines key skills, knowledge and networks identified by alumni as being developed on award in Australia which enabled their ability to contribute to the response during the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. First it details the different ‘soft’ skills and ‘technical’ skills developed on award and used by alumni, and then examines the networks alumni established with Australia and how these are helping in collaborative efforts to combat the pandemic across the globe.

3.2 Skills and knowledge developed on award

All alumni interviewed for the case study identified a mixture of discipline-specific technical knowledge and a range of soft skills which they developed on award as being integral to their ability to contribute to the COVID-19 response.

Alumni credit Australian expertise, and the quality of teaching and learning they experienced on award as providing them with a strong technical knowledge. They also highlighted the way in which their Australian courses developed a deep insight into the practical applications of this knowledge. While at university in Australia, these insights were developed through real world examples such as case studies, group work, analysis of data and report writing, as well as work integrated learning opportunities such as internships or industry-based projects. This combination of skills and knowledge has given alumni ‘confidence’ and the ability to adapt practices to address the challenges caused by COVID-19.

It is clear from the evidence collected below that alumni who participated in this case study maintain strong positive views of Australia, Australians and Australian expertise (Outcome 4 of the Australia Awards).

The following key skills were identified by alumni as essential to their work responding to the pandemic and illustrate the breadth of knowledge they gained while on award in Australia.

Skills and knowledge developed on award

‘Soft’/interpersonal skills include:

- communication (verbal and written)
- intercultural competencies
- leadership.

‘Hard’/ technical skills include:

- discipline-specific technical skills in their fields
e.g.: medicine, public health, nursing management, media and communications, mental health and counselling, education, and inclusive development
- English language (verbal and written)
- project management
- research, analysis and evaluation methods
- strategic communication.

3.2.1 Soft skills developed on award

Over the last five years of the GTF research, alumni have consistently identified soft skills developed on award as providing them with the ability to work effectively in teams, lead and manage staff, and engage with a range of internal and external stakeholders.

The following section explores the specific soft skills identified by alumni in this case study as being fundamental to their work in responding to the pandemic. These skills are grouped into three main categories: communication, intercultural competencies, and leadership.

Communication skills

The eight alumni identified as part of this case study identified communication skills developed on award as essential in responding to COVID-19 pandemic within their various roles. Communication skills such as English language proficiency, public speaking and presentation skills, and the ability to author comprehensive reports or documents for a range of stakeholders have enabled alumni to work collaboratively with colleagues and external organisations in response to COVID-19. These skills and the way in which they were acquired are explained in the alumni quotes here:

The skills I learnt from Charles Sturt University in Bathurst are very useful, particularly communication skills, research skills, TV and radio production, interview and information gathering.
Mr Phouthavong

I think I've acquired a lot of skills from my training. One of them is the communication skills. I'm able to communicate both in writing as well as verbally. I think I'm one person that is now a public speaker and I am able to present at any forum... the other skill that I've acquired from there [Australia] is the interpersonal skills... Ms Wamundila

When I did my Masters [degree] at Curtin University, it was a different education for me, having come from a background of Nepal and India. It was different, like doing the literature review, research, presentations, communications, because when I was studying in Australia, it was not just the course content I gained... I gained knowledge in how to make an effective presentation, how to communicate properly, even in English... Ms Shrestha

Another key communication skill identified by several alumni was the ability to write successful international project applications for development projects (highlighted in interviews by Dr Mansoor and Mr Petai) and funding grants to improve facilities and medical services (Dr Osagie and Ms Wamundila).

For example, Dr Osagie used skills developed on award as part of his Master of Public Health to apply for funding to improve facilities within his hospital in Abuja, Nigeria including the eye clinic (funded by the Australian High Commission), neonatal equipment (Japanese Government) and Sexual Assault Resource Centre (British Council). The latter project in particular being a critical piece in his contributions to COVID-19 responses in Nigeria.

Intercultural competencies

In addition to communication skills, alumni also identified intercultural competencies as essential to their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Intercultural competencies such as cross-cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and respect, diplomacy, and inclusion as essential when managing projects and collaborating within diverse teams or across a range of internal and external stakeholders.

Working with different clans in remote villages of PNG, Mr Petai also employs valuable intercultural competencies he developed on award.

The level of sensitivity that you display when you are with, for example, communities or tribes or clans, you need to be quite sensitive. And before doing things, you have to have some background checks or background understanding or knowledge of what things are acceptable and what things are not acceptable. And I think that the Master in Anthropology at ANU really prepared me well for that part of my communication.

Dr Tran noted that coordinating the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine has been ‘a huge task, with a very complicated background and a lot of political dimensions around issues.’ She uses her in-depth technical knowledge, soft skills, and previous work experience as a senior government official to navigate through the politics and ensure that the vaccine can be disseminated equitably throughout the region.

You need to be very sensitive and handle things in a harmonious way, respecting cultural differences, mutual understanding... It's an art.

Leadership development

All alumni interviewed for this case study were in formal leadership positions in their work and mentioned that they developed many of these skills while on award through specific training embedded in their degrees which built their confidence and have led to increased responsibility within their organisations over time.

Dr Osagie reflected that he has used skills developed on award to lead staff through changes in practices such as the digitisation of patient records, and the implementation of COVID-19 safe public health protocols and the use of personal protection equipment (PPE) to ensure continuation of services at his hospital during the pandemic.

One of the core courses we did was leadership for public health, and I think that has really helped me, not just with COVID, even in administering at the hospital because at the medical school we are not taught to manage people, how to manage associates.

For Mr Petai, his course provided him with a range of leadership skills and cultural competencies which he uses in his daily work as a development consultant in PNG:

In terms of the skills and knowledge that I've gained from ANU under the Australia Awards, I appreciate the fact that so much that I've learnt, I'm using in my work. First and foremost, I would say is the leadership and organisational skills that I've gained that I'm using now, because under this work here, it's more like a multicultural, multi-skilled kind of activity where you require different skills, [with the] different kinds of people involved in these two projects.

Dr Mansoor received additional leadership training through the Australian Experiential Learning Centre as part of his Australian Leadership Award. He attributes this as providing him with vital skills to fill a gap in leadership among Afghans in the public health sector on his return.

In Afghanistan at that time, in 2008, we did not have any public health specialists... public health professionals or specialists were very rare in Afghanistan... I think, getting to this [role] at HPRO, would be attributed to the knowledge and skills, the competence I obtained during my study in Australia.

3.2.2 Technical skills

Discipline-specific skills

Many alumni identified technical knowledge gained on award as providing them with firm foundational knowledge which has allowed them to build their expertise, confidence and respond to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic in their workplaces. Most notably, Dr Tran reflected:

The Master of Public Health course in Australia helped me a lot, equipped me with public health knowledge in conducting any public health programmes in context. For example, the epidemiology course, health promotions, public health programmes, health management... I think it is the foundation for me to build up [my] capacity, knowledge, learning, together with my experience working in the field.

Ms Namgyel found that her Master of Counselling was ‘well designed’ and provided her with strong ‘theoretical knowledge’ as part of her first year and gave her valuable ‘first-hand experience’ of patients and clinical practices during her second year.

I actually learnt how to translate my period of practice from that organisation. So I've worked closely with numerous people who needed therapy... clients with different mental health challenges... I had first-hand experience working with somebody who has schizophrenia, somebody who has bi-polar, somebody who has borderline personality, somebody who has intellectual disability...

Ms Shrestha stated that while at Curtin University she undertook a course which included a project which required students to conduct field research in a local nursing home. She attributes this ‘small learning’ as providing her with a unique insight into the management of pharmaceuticals in a health care setting and enriching her professional knowledge.

My subject was clinical pharmacy and there was one of the projects I did where I had to go to an aged care facility and then everything was related to that...[the] clinical pharmacy, medicine; there were side effects, how to manage the doses. That is actually the foundation for me to have the knowledge. When I joined the vaccine manufacturing company, I knew what it was...I had a good base, how vaccines are used, what they are, why they are important.

Research, analysis and evaluation skills

Four alumni (Ms Wamundila, Dr Mansoor, Mr Petai, and Ms Shrestha) specifically identified their studies in Australia as enhancing their analytical and research skills and improving their capacity to monitor and evaluate programs and build evidence to enact change. Ms Wamundila exemplified this in her work in maternal and child health:

Another skill that I acquired from there [Australia] is analysing ... we are able to analyse the maternal deaths that are happening amongst the women of childbearing age that are related to pregnancy, as well as those of the newborn, and we're able to do that and see how best we can come with the root cause and be able to tackle the gaps that are identified. We're able to come up with solutions that are able to target the root causes of the maternal as well as newborn deaths and be able to share this information widely.

Dr Mansoor highlighted that he has been able to use specific monitoring and evaluation skills developed on award at the Herston School of Public Health at the University of Queensland to support his work evaluating international programs in the complex political environment of Afghanistan:

The work I'm doing is through the contribution from the education that I got in Australia. Public health evaluation was one of the courses I took at that time. The social research and then the responsible conduct of research. When you are doing research, there are many ethical dilemmas that you need to be aware of and need to handle in a way that you are still compliant with the ethical standards.

3.3 Networks and collaboration

It is important to note, that in the context of this case study, evidence of alumni using networks developed in Australia to contribute to COVID-19 responses are relatively limited. However, there is evidence of alumni collaborating in informal ‘communities of practice’ with networks they established post award with former classmates, lecturers, industry leaders and mentors they met in Australia to solve problems, share experiences and offer each other support during the pandemic. The findings from this group of alumni suggest achievement of Outcome 2—cooperation has been achieved through these informal networks in response to COVID-19.

In addition, there are strong examples for formal collaboration with Australian institutions working on COVID-19 responses through existing partnerships with the WHO. Although these formal partnerships cannot be attributed directly to Dr Tran’s time on award in Australia, they have been strengthened during the pandemic due to the work WHO is doing in the region to combat COVID-19.

3.3.1 Communities of practice

The alumni interviewed in this case study cited that they remain closely connected with people they met on award through social media. Many of these alumni have developed informal communities of practice with their former classmates, lecturers and other associates, sharing ideas and initiatives within their fields, especially during the pandemic.

For example, Ms Shrestha noted:

I have a bunch of friends; most of my close friends with whom I studied in Australia are all over the world. Most of them are in the health sector. Whenever we talk, we always talk about, “Okay, what’s happening in what country, what will be the strategy?”

Ms Namgyel has remained connected to former classmates, staff from A Place to Belong where she undertook her internship, and other professionals she has met through her studies in Australia and her work with international volunteers in Bhutan. She uses social media to stay in touch, share ideas, challenges and seek ‘peer supervision’.

The networks that I’ve met, over the time in my course in Australia, I made so many friends in the same course, from different countries. They’re all in touch right now. We have so many social media platforms to keep in touch. We have chats, how things are going, but we also discuss cases, which is a very healthy way of keeping in touch with our own practice...

In addition, Ms Namgyel has also maintained a close relationship with her Australian supervisor, a former volunteer in Bhutan. The relationship has provided her the opportunity to debrief professionally with a trusted mentor and build resilience during the peak times during the pandemic.

I’m closely in touch with her and I also seek supervision when I have these issues or when I’m stuck. And it has definitely contributed in this COVID time.

3.3.2 Formal partnerships

Dr Tran has maintained strong connections with Australian institutions since completing her Master of Public Health at UNSW. These professional relationships developed through collaborations and formal partnership during her time working for the Vietnamese Ministry of Health, as a public health academic, and in her current role as a regional director at the WHO.

As part of her current role, Dr Tran works closely with WHO’s network of collaborating centres in Australia to respond to COVID-19. Although, Dr Tran is not directly responsible for the development of these partnerships, she explains how central they are to the WHO’s global response of the pandemic.

In my current position, I have a lot of Australian colleagues who work in the WHO in the Western Pacific region, so I continue to have further collaboration and we have many WHO collaborating centres based in Australia. Melbourne University, UNSW (a lot), Sydney University, and Queensland University. They belong to the network of WHO collaborating centres. Australia is one of the members of the WHO, who play a very important role in supporting other countries in the region and in working with WHO on public health and global health issues.

Dr Tran noted that WHO is also collaborating with the Black Dog Institute in Sydney on the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of workers especially those in the frontline services in the region, investigating the impact of depression, burn out, and suicide. According to Dr Tran, ‘Australia is the country that has the expertise on mental health, so we are working with a lot of institutions in Australia on this aspect’.

4. Conclusion

This case study highlights the significant contributions Australia Awards alumni have made to the COVID-19 response during the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020—February 2021).

In-depth interviews for this case study have shown that contributions include emergency response and public health management of the pandemic in the World Health Organisation's Western Pacific Region; development and implementation of front line mental health services in Bhutan; delivery of essential medical services including maternal and neonatal care, reproductive health and support for sexual assault and gender-based violence in Zambia and Nigeria; design and delivery of an inclusive public health campaigns and accessible education programs for pre-school and school aged children in Lao People's Democratic Republic; quality assurance and distribution of vaccines for the global market; and monitoring and evaluation of responses to COVID-19 in Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan and Africa. As a result, this case study shows strong achievement of Australia Awards long-term Outcome 1—contributions to sustain development in relation to the COVID-19 response.

The findings here also reflect the broader global outcomes explored by the GTF's Global Tracer Survey 2020, which provided an insight into the contributions of over 6,200 alumni. The data showed nearly half of alumni respondents were involved in the COVID-19 response. Alumni who studied health fields, were in a leadership position, or worked in a multilateral organisation or not for profit organisations were also more likely to have had a direct contribution to the response.

The evidence of alumni using networks developed in Australia to contribute directly to COVID-19 responses is relatively limited. However, the report does identify strong formal institutional ties and close collaboration on COVID-19 research between the World Health Organisation and Australian universities, which is being strengthened by a former Australia Awards alumna in a senior leadership position. In addition, several alumni cited close collaboration with former classmates, lecturers, industry leaders and mentors they met in Australia in informal 'communities of practice' on social media during the pandemic as providing them with a valuable forum to share ideas, challenges and seek wellbeing support during the pandemic.

Alumni also demonstrated strong positive views of Australia and Australian expertise and identified specific soft skills and discipline-specific technical knowledge that they had developed on award as being integral to their ability to contribute to the COVID-19 response within their various roles. For alumni in this case study, Australia Awards long-term Outcome 4—positive views of Australia is achieved.

The evidence from both the case study and the Global Tracer Survey 2020, demonstrate the investment in Australian development scholarships has provided Australia's partner countries with improved human resource capacity to respond to emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear alumni are using technical knowledge and a range of soft skills developed on award in Australia to respond to the multidimensional (social, economic, and public health) challenges caused by the pandemic. Many of these alumni are leaders in their fields and are sharing their skills and knowledge with others to help their communities adapt to change, rebuild stability, and strengthen essential services in response to COVID-19. Alumni in this case study are achieving the long-term development outcomes of the Australian Awards.

5. Alumni Profiles



Dr Tran Thi Giang Huong (M.D, M.P.H, Ph.D)

The Master of Public Health course in Australia helped me a lot, equipped me with public health knowledge and conducting any public health programme in context. For example, the epidemiology course, health promotions, public health programmes, health management course, all the knowledge that I studied equipped me with a very strong and solid knowledge about public health.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Vietnam

Years

1999–2000

Degree

Master of Public Health

University

University of New South Wales

Current position

Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, WHO for the Western Pacific Region

Biography

A former paediatrician, with over 25 years' experience as a senior public health official in Vietnam, Dr Tran Thi Giang Huong became the first Vietnamese woman to become a divisional director at the World Health Organisation (WHO). An Australia Development scholarship alum, Dr Tran studied a Master of Public Health at the University of New South Wales (1999–2000).

In July 2019, Dr Tran joined the WHO as the Director of the Division of Programmes for Disease Control in the Western Pacific Region and her portfolio includes communicable diseases and non-communicable diseases and mental health.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, she took on the additional role of Acting Regional Emergency Director and coordinated the initial emergency response in the region from February to October 2020.

In October 2020, Dr Tran was asked to lead the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in the region and she is supporting member states to develop national deployment plans of the vaccine. Working closely with stakeholders such as UNICEF and Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance), she is helping WHO to support the fair and equitable distribution of the vaccine to over 1.9 billion people in the region through the COVAX Facility.



Mr Tabongphet Phouthavong

Since COVID-19, UNICEF needs to work very close with other UN organizations, particularly WHO. We try to provide information to the most vulnerable people. Therefore, communication materials must be simple and easy to understand and translate into ethnic languages. Since people in far rural areas have limited access to information, TV and radio, our communication team also recommended UNICEF to provide community loudspeakers system as tools to provide information to people.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Years

1998–1999

Degree

Master of Arts (Communications–Journalism)

University

Charles Sturt University, Bathurst

Current position

Communication Specialist, UNICEF Lao PDR

Biography

As a Communications Specialist at UNICEF Vientiane, Mr Tabongphet Phouthavong has been actively involved in disseminating COVID-19 safe information through targeted public health media campaigns and education programs for children and young people.

Awarded an Australian Development scholarship (1998-1999), Mr Phouthavong studied a Master of Arts (Communications - Journalism) at Charles Sturt University. He re-joined the team at UNICEF on his return to Lao PDR in 1999, and over the last three decades he has worked closely with government stakeholders and the Lao PDR media to advocate and disseminate information to promote the rights of children and young people and support sustainable development initiatives.

In response to COVID-19, Mr Phouthavong has been using his expertise to disseminate early learning materials for children in lockdown in collaboration with Lao PDR Government. Examples of his contributions include the early learning television programmes “My Village” for pre-school children and “My House” which promotes education at home during the lockdown, and the “Safely Back to School” media campaign. He has also worked closely with Lao PDR National Radio to establish a national youth media program called “Open Heart Open Airways,” which produces weekly broadcasts and social media posts to 18 provinces in several ethnic languages on youth related issues.



Ms Caren Chizuni Wamundila

I think I've acquired a lot of skills from my training [in Australia]. One of them is the communication skills. I'm able to communicate both in writing as well as verbally. I'm a public speaker, I am able to speak at any forum. The other skill that I've acquired is the interpersonal skills. I've managed partners and stakeholders to support the ministry and support the maternal health services in terms of financial as well as technical support.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Zambia

Years

2013–2014

Degree

Master of Nursing

University

Monash University

Current position

Chief Safe Motherhood Officer, Reproductive Health Unit, Ministry of Health, Zambia

Biography

As the Chief Safe Motherhood Officer at the Ministry of Health, Ms Caren Chizuni Wamundila is responsible for maternal and neonatal health activities across Zambia. Her role involves working closely with UN agencies and partners to support safe motherhood practices through integrated reproductive health services, health policy and guidelines, training, surveillance, and responses to maternal and perinatal deaths.

A former midwife and trainer, Ms Wamundila received an Australian Development scholarship and studied a Master of Nursing at Monash University (2013-2014), specialised in Nursing Management and Practice.

In response to the decline in attendance and delivery of reproductive services and safe antenatal and postnatal care due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms Wamundila spearheaded the development of new integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child and Adolescent Health & Nutrition guidelines. These are designed to ensure that essential services remain open, accessible, and safe for women during the pandemic. Her work is helping to reduce maternal and child mortality, while also providing integrated services in one place to ensure women and girls in Zambia have continued access to family planning, HIV and STD testing, safe abortions, and support from family violence.



Ms Kajal Shrestha

I'm proud to say that I'm an essential worker... I feel like every day when I come to work, I am learning. I want to learn more, hopefully I will make the world a better place by contributing whatever I can in terms of quality.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Nepal

Years

2008–2009

Degree

Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy)

University

Curtin University of Technology

Current position

Product Quality Manager, Sanofi Pasteur

Biography

Ms Kajal Shrestha is involved in ensuring the production and distribution of quality vaccines and medicines for the large multinational pharmaceutical company, Sanofi Pasteur. The company develops a range of vaccines used in immunization programs across the globe including the polio, smallpox, rubella, measles, influenza, hepatitis A and B vaccines.

An Australian Development scholarship alumna, Ms Shrestha studied a Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy) at Curtin University of Technology (2008-2009) and is now using skills and knowledge developed on award to contribute to the production and quality assurance of much needed medicines and vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her work is helping to lessen the burden on health systems and limit potential outbreaks of preventable diseases by ensuring ongoing access to safe pharmaceuticals.



Dr Osayande Ehigie Osagie

One of the core courses we did [in Australia] was leadership for public health, and I think that has really helped me, not just with COVID, even in administering at the hospital because at the medical school we are not taught to manage people, how to manage associates... You have different demands from different units and the resources are limited.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Nigeria

Years

2008–2009

Degree

Master of Public Health

University

University of Melbourne

Current position

Medical Director, Chief Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the General Hospital Bwari, Abuja, Nigeria

Biography

Dr Osayande Ehigie Osagie is the Medical Director of the General Hospital Bwari, in Abuja, Nigeria and works as a specialist Obstetrician and Gynaecologist. He is responsible for the day-to-day administration and general running of the hospital, training, and deployment of staff, as well as coordinating the obstetrics and gynaecology units.

Awarded an Australian Development scholarship (2008-2009) Dr Osagie studied a Master of Public Health at the University of Melbourne. He has been able to utilise skills and knowledge gained on award to transform practices within his hospital, including the implementation of a computerised medical record system, improvements to the residential training program, and the use of international grants to apply for much needed medical equipment and resources.

In response to COVID-19, Dr Osagie implemented first responder training for all staff and strict public health protocols, this limited the impact of the second wave on the hospital. In reaction to a steep rise in sexual assault and family violence in the community during lockdown, Dr Osagie worked closely with the British Council to set up a free Sexual Assault Reference Centre within the hospital. The centre provides integrated medical services, counselling, and mental health support for victims of sexual violence.



Dr Ghulam Farooq Mansoor

In 2008, we did not have any public health specialists... public health professionals or specialists were very rare in Afghanistan. That brought me into a very crucial position in Health Protection and Research Organization... I think, this would be attributed to the knowledge and skills, the competence I obtained during my study in Australia.

Scholarship

Australian Leadership Award

Country

Afghanistan

Years

2008–2009

Degree

Master of Public Health

University

University of Queensland

Current position

General Director of the Health Protection and Research Organization (HPRO), Afghanistan

Biography

A physician and public health expert, Dr Ghulam Farooq Mansoor has had an extensive career working on public health initiatives in Afghanistan including the eradication of polio and improvements in maternal and child health and nutrition. In 2008 he received an Australian Leadership Award and studied a Master of Public Health at the University of Queensland.

Currently working as a public health consultant and the General Director of the Health Protection and Research Organization (HPRO), Dr Mansoor splits his time between different projects. As part of the COVID-19 response, he has been involved in the evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to support the Ministry of the Interior in Afghanistan, to reduce the spread of COVID-19 amongst the National Police Force, and a formative study for UNICEF to investigate attitudes among the Afghan community towards the COVID vaccine to inform their communications strategy for the roll-out of the vaccine. He is also providing capacity building to government partners through his work as the Research Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Director for the USAID Initiative for Hygiene Sanitation and Nutrition.



Mr Luke Petai

In terms of the skills and knowledge that I've gained from ANU under the Australia Awards, I appreciate the fact that so much that I've learnt, I'm using in my work. First and foremost, I would say is the leadership and organisational skills that I've gained that I'm using now, because under this work here, it's more like a multicultural, multi-skilled kind of activity where you require different skills, [with the] different kinds of people involved in these two projects.

Scholarship

Australia Awards Scholarship

Country

Papua New Guinea

Years

2016–2017

Degree

Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development

University

Australian National University

Current position

Social Development Specialist, Rural Service Delivery of Projects, World Bank and Education Consultant, Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan, UNICEF

Biography

Mr Luke Petai is a development consultant with over 10 years' experience as a program manager and monitoring and evaluation specialist in Papua New Guinea (PNG). He received an Australia Awards scholarship and studied a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development at the Australian National University (2016–2017).

Splitting his time among development projects, Mr Petai is currently working as an Education Consultant, providing technical support on online survey and questionnaire design to the National Department of Education as part of the UNICEF (PNG), COVID-19 Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan. The plan is designed to ensure education in PNG remains safe, accessible, and continuous during the pandemic.

In addition to his work in the education sector, Mr Petai is also working as a Social Development Specialist for the World Bank's Rural Services Delivery Project supporting the project management unit at the Department of Provincial and Local Government to roll-out the project to five provinces. Encouraging inclusive participation in the development of local infrastructure, the project is also contributing to educating rural communities about COVID-19 through embedding public health information within the program.



Ms Sangay Choden Namgyel

Mental health is surrounded by stigma and discrimination [in Bhutan], many people don't come forward for help, which is why the National Mental Health Response Team, took advantage of this time to also educate people on mental health... [We run] at least three webinars in a week, which we are doing on a voluntary basis... I am doing Friday webinars for all the counsellors in the country... Webinars [are] an open forum for people to join and learn about mental health, learn about domestic violence, learn about substance abuse and about treatment.

Scholarship

Australian Development Scholarship

Country

Bhutan

Year

2013–2014

Degree

Master of Counselling

University

University of Queensland

Current position

Core member of the National Mental Health Response Team—
Volunteer Frontline Mental Health Counsellor and Technical
Adviser on Mental Health

Program Leader and Lecturer, Clinical Counselling, Faculty of
Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical
Sciences of Bhutan

Biography

A mental health academic and counsellor, Ms Sangay Choden Namgyel has played a crucial role in supporting the Bhutanese Ministry of Health's response to COVID-19. As part of the six-member, National Mental Health Response Team, she has been involved in providing frontline crisis management and psychosocial counselling services via a national telephone hotline and producing webinars on mental health issues.

Awarded an Australian Development scholarship, Ms Namgyel, studied a Master of Counselling at the University of Queensland (2013-2014) and undertook a year practicum at 'A Place to Belong', a mental health service in Brisbane.

As the Program Leader and first Bhutanese lecturer of the clinical counselling course at University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan, Ms Namgyel has helped to adapt the curriculum to suit the Bhutanese context and incorporate practicum units covering relevant issues such as substance abuse, violence and psychiatric issues. She has also contributed to the development of a "feelings" tool, a poster to help patients identify their emotions, to help Bhutanese bridge the gap in their vocabulary which has limited words to express feelings.

6. References

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Annex 1: Methodology

This case study is the 22nd undertaken by the GTF. It was designed to investigate the extent to which alumni of Australian development scholarships are contributing to the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collating evidence relating to these alumni included analysis of survey data collected by the GTF in the Global Tracer Survey 2020, as well as in-depth interviews with eight alumni. Detail relating to the overall design for the GTF case studies, as well as technical methodologies for the Global Tracer Surveys can be found in previous reports by the GTF here: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/australia-awards/Pages/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility>

Objectives

As discussed in the introduction of this report, this particular study has been undertaken in order to increase the evidence and knowledge about these alumni. Three overarching aims of this case study are:

- a. to articulate different types of alumni contributions as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- b. to identify skills and knowledge developed on award which have enabled them to respond effectively to challenges caused by the pandemic.
- c. to understand the way in which connections and networks developed while on award have been maintained and have facilitated alumni contributions as part of the COVID-19 response.

Intertwined in this case study aims is the 'big-picture' focus of the GTF; to examine the outcomes of alumni in relation to the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards. These long-term outcomes are detailed in the main body of the report, and the propositions that underpin the analysis of the evidence collected in each case study can be found in Annex 2.

Approach

The data collection method used for the interviews in this case study was through interviews, conducted online using a range of online video-conferencing platforms, essentially tailored to the needs of the individual being interviewed. A set of questions were specifically developed for this case study, to investigate the direct contributions of alumni to the COVID-19 response, and identify any skills or knowledge gained on award which helped these contributions. Questions in the interview are asked consistently for each alumni and align with the research propositions (located at Annex 2) and long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards. This ensures that data collected directly relate to the key questions the case studies are seeking to answer and that there is consistency across each case study.

As noted above the methodological detail relating to the survey data collection approach is contained in survey report of the GTF Survey 2020, accessible via the following link: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/australia-awards/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility-year-5-results>

Sample definition and selection

The research of the GTF focuses on alumni of DFAT's Australia Awards and previous Australian Government-funded scholarships and awards (these include programs dating back to the Colombo Plan, which commence in the 1950s). For each case study undertaken by the GTF, this focus is further refined to a specific cohort of alumni.

This case study focuses on 'alumni contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic response' during the first year (February 2020-February 2021). The in-depth interviews in this case study involved eight alumni. Further insight into the characteristics and outcomes of alumni involved in the COVID-19 response for this report has been included based on analysis of responses to the Global Tracer Survey 2020 undertaken by the GTF between November and December 2020. This survey collected data from more than 6200 alumni of Australian development scholarships across the globe.

The focus of the interview sample was to aim for eight alumni with a balance of characteristics region of origin, gender and sector of work/field of education. A matrix table was constructed to guide recruitment.

Interviewed alumni were identified and recruited by extracting data from the Global Tracer Survey 2020.

Details relating to the alumni interview participants are included in the table below.

Table 1 Alumni participants

Gender	Name	Award Completion Year	Award	Course and University	Current Position
F	Dr Tran Thi Giang Huong	2000	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Public Health, University of New South Wales	Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, WHO for the Western Pacific Region
M	Mr Tabongphet Phouthavong	1999	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Arts (Communications - Journalism), Charles Sturt University	Communication Specialist, UNICEF Lao PDR
F	Ms Caren Chizuni Wamundila	2014	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Nursing, Monash University	Chief Safe Motherhood Officer, Reproductive Health Unit, Ministry of Health, Zambia
F	Ms Kajal Shrestha	2009	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Pharmacy (Clinical Pharmacy), Curtin University of Technology	Product Quality Manager, Sanofi Pasteur
M	Dr Osayande Ehigie Osagie	2009	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Public Health, University of Melbourne	Medical Director, Chief Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the General Hospital Bwari, Abuja, Nigeria
M	Dr Ghulam Farooq Mansoor	2009	Australian Leadership Award	Master of Public Health, University of Queensland	General Director of the Health Protection and Research Organization (HPRO), Afghanistan
M	Mr Luke Petai	2017	Australia Awards Scholarship	Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development, Australian National University	Social Development Specialist, Rural Service Delivery of Projects, World Bank and Education Consultant, Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan, UNICEF
F	Ms Sangay Choden Namgyel	2014	Australian Development Scholarship	Master of Counselling, University of Queensland	Core member of the National Mental Health Response Team—Volunteer Frontline Mental Health Counsellor and Technical Adviser on Mental Health and Program Leader and Lecturer, Clinical Counselling, Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan

Data management and reporting

Interviews were voice recorded (with approval granted to do so). In addition, the researchers annotated responses during the interview. A transcription specialist transcribed all interview recordings. After the completion of the interview and transcription process, the researchers consolidated the written and oral recordings into a single near-verbatim transcript (with restarting of sentences and fillers excluded).

Coding and review

Interview scripts were subsequently coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. This enabled emerging themes to be identified and links to be made between participants that supported or refuted the research propositions, as aligned with the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards.

Analysis of the case study data involved a strategy that was guided by the theoretical proposition developed under the conceptual framework for the case study and by the techniques identified in the GTF's Case Study Approach document.

Where requested case study participants were sent segments of the report where clarification or review and approval were necessary.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this research that were inherent to both the nature of the research and the research process, as discussed below.

Positive response bias

It is probable that alumni who felt that they had a positive experience as an Australian Government scholarship recipient and/or had success in their career following their award are more likely to agree to participate in case studies. In a study by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (Mawer, 2014), recognition of positive response bias is highlighted:

...there is widespread recognition that a more pressing problem is nonresponse bias in which those who reply to sample surveys are likely to be engaged with alumni associations or tracing (e.g. Day, Stackhouse and Geddes, 2009) and disproportionately represent the 'successful' outcomes of scholarship programmes (p.9).

Accordingly, it is likely that the alumni in this case study had a positive bias towards their experience, outcomes and views of Australia. The GTF has developed interview questions and analyses approaches to reduce the impact of this bias—these are applied consistently across all case studies. Through this approach, leading questions are avoided, and alumni are offered opportunities to reflect on their outcomes at the beginning and at the end of the interview without specific questions to guide their answers.

Research process

The ability to code the interview transcripts effectively is dependent on understanding the partner-country development goals at the time these alumni were awarded their scholarships. Given the fact that participants in this case study were spread across eight different countries, the ability to fully contextualise each alumni contributions to their country of origin's experiences and impact of COVID-19 was not feasible. This differs from other case studies of the GTF which have been focussed on a country and a sector of work, which has meant more detailed contextualisation of impact can be explored.

Annex 2: Case Study Propositions

Explanatory case studies require the development of propositions that are intricately linked to the original research questions. A proposition is a statement that helps direct attention to something that should be examined in a case study. The researcher has to make a speculation, on the basis of the literature and any other earlier evidence, as to what they expect the findings of the research to be. When a case study proposal includes specific propositions, it increases the likelihood that the researcher can limit the scope of study and complete the project. The researcher can have several propositions to guide the study, but each must have a distinct focus and purpose. The data collection and analysis can then be structured in order to support or refute the research propositions.

For the GTF, propositions were formed using the Global Strategy outcomes as the basis. Sub-propositions were formulated by speculating on the underlying assumption or enabling factors that realise the proposition. In alignment with the methodology, instruments will be designed to collect data that both support and refute the propositions.

1. Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to achieving partner-country development goals⁴.
 - a. alumni develop skills, knowledge and networks on award that enable and are used to contribute to achieving partner-country development goals
 - b. alumni understand, value and want to contribute to partner-country development goals.
2. Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries
 - a. alumni possess and are able to leverage their useful networks and relationships.
3. Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and business [have been developed] in Australia and partner countries
 - a. alumni possess and are able to leverage their useful networks and relationships
 - b. partnerships that are developed are effective and mutually advantageous to participating countries.
4. Alumni view Australia and Australian expertise positively
 - a. alumni's views are underpinned by their experiences in Australia.
5. The benefits of receiving Australia Awards scholarship are experienced equally by all recipients.
 - a. receiving Australia Awards scholarship positively addresses, rather than reinforces, imbalances that are associated with gender and disability.

⁴ This proposition differs from the Australia Awards Program Logic long-term Outcome 1 in order to link this proposition to the Goal of the Australia Awards Program. The use of the term 'partner-country development goals instead of 'sustainable development' makes the proposition and ensuing questions more relevant and relatable to alumni.

Annex 3: Alumni—scholarships: Interview Guide for COVID-19 Case Study

Purpose of AAGTF and research: The overall purpose of the Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (the Facility) is to enable the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to assess the development contributions and public/economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment in Australia Awards.

Focus of this Case Study: This Case Study into Australia Awards alumni responses to COVID-19

Consent Form: Please take the time to read through the supplied consent form regarding your privacy rights and consent. You can withdraw at any time. Contact numbers are also provided should you have any questions following this. Please let us know when you are happy to proceed and to be recorded.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?
[Validation question]

Could you please tell us your name, your current position and organisation, and the qualification you completed, as part of your Australia Awards Scholarship?

We are interested in learning about Australia Awards alumni's contribution to the response to COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Could you tell us a little about your current role in your organisation?
(*Prompt—how long have you worked there, what are your main tasks/responsibilities?*)
2. Can you tell us a little bit about the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your country?
3. Could you describe how you are involved in the COVID-19 response within your current workplace?
 - a. Can you provide some examples?
 - b. Was this a significant change in your pre - COVID-19 duties?
4. Thinking about your current work in responding to COVID-19, have you been able to apply the skills or knowledge that you gained on award in Australia? Can you provide some examples?
5. Have you been able to share those skills and knowledge with others in your organisation or community? Can you provide some examples?
6. Have you been able to utilise any professional or personal connections made on award to help you in your work responding to COVID-19? (*Prompt—advice from university lecturers or friends, collaboration with Australian organisations or university linkages through research or technical support*)
7. Thinking about the work you are doing as part of the COVID-19 response could you describe an achievement that you are most proud of, in your work or community?
8. That covers our questions today, is there anything you would like to add?