

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility Tracer Survey: Alumni of 2006-2010 Executive Summary

This report details the development, fieldwork and findings of the Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility's (the Facility) first annual Tracer Survey. The Facility undertakes a range of research in order to enable the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to assess the development contributions, and public and economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment in Australia Awards.

This Tracer Survey involved the engagement of alumni who completed scholarships or fellowships as part of the Australia Awards or predecessor programs between 2006 and 2010. Alumni were asked a range of questions via an online survey, focussed on exploring the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards. A follow-up telephone interview with a sample of alumni respondents collected further detail for analysis. In total 1,510 alumni in this cohort from 27 different countries participated in the survey (a 35.9 per cent response rate), and 527 participated in the telephone follow-up interview.

The survey data provide a valuable quantitative insight into alumni use of knowledge and skills, development of networks and contribution to cooperation with Australia. The responses also offer rich examples from alumni of the types of contributions they are making, the way in which they are using their award and the things that help, and hinder them in reaching their potential. This report uses the quantitative findings to draw out key findings, and the qualitative information provided by alumni as illustrative examples to give context to the findings.

In terms of responding to the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards, the following summary offers some overall findings. A further summary of the Tracer Survey is included in the [infographic](#) at the end of this section.

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

- **Most alumni** (98 per cent) indicated they have passed on their skills and knowledge to others in their country on return from their award.
- **Most alumni** (97 per cent) indicated they had introduced improved practices and innovations in their work on return from their award.

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

- **More than 40 per cent** of alumni have maintained frequent contact with fellow alumni, while **about one third have frequent contact with friends** in Australia and about a quarter with Australian students/alumni.
- **Alumni were less likely to have maintained frequent contact with Australian organisations**, with 17 per cent having frequent contact with universities, 11 per cent with Australian businesses and 7 per cent with Australian Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates.

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

- **More than half** (54.5 per cent) of alumni have had a professional link with an Australian organisation at some time following award.

- Of these links, about half are with Australian institutions, one quarter within the government sector and the remainder shared between the private sector and non-government organisations.

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

- For most alumni **their experience in Australia positively influenced their perception of Australia** (96 per cent of alumni) and their perception of Australian skills and expertise (94 per cent).
- **Almost all alumni** (96 per cent) have provided advice to people in their home country about pursuing opportunities in Australia.

In addition to these findings, alumni highlighted that the factors that helped them to contribute following their award included **the new skills and knowledge** they had gained, **support from their employers** and **support from networks established** while on award. They also outlined factors that challenged them in making contributions. These tended to focus on the workplace and included **lack of recognition of new skills, lack of opportunities and cultural and bureaucratic barriers**.

The Tracer Survey also explored the contribution of the Australia Awards to gender equity, disability inclusiveness and increasing opportunities in rural and remote areas. In the area of **disability**, some alumni included information about activities being undertaken **to improve perceptions and increase inclusiveness**. For **remote and rural alumni** issues in relation to **communication and connections were identified as factors impeding** their ability to maintain networks following their award.

In terms of **gender equity**, responses from the Tracer Survey suggest a range of activities, programs and organisations have been established by alumni aimed at **empowering women in their communities and raising awareness of key issues**. However, constraints on the ability of alumnae to contribute were also apparent in the responses to the Tracer Survey, with cultural barriers being mentioned in relation to applying for scholarships or fellowships and in achieving success in the workplace following return.



key outcomes

98% of alumni Passed on skills and knowledge to others



97% of alumni Introduced improved practices and innovations at work



94% of alumni Say their awards experience positively influenced perception of Australian skills and expertise



55% of alumni Developed professional links with Australia



Maintaining contact

42% have frequent contact with other scholarship alumni

32% have frequent contact with friends in Australia

26% have frequent contact with other Australian alumni

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility Fiji Alumni Case Study- Executive Summary

This report details the outcomes of a Case Study of Fijian Alumni of Australian development scholarships. Alumni in this case study completed their scholarships between the late 1960's and mid-1990s in the field of education. This research was conducted by the Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (the Facility) to provide the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with evidence to evaluate the impact of the Australia Awards.

Findings

Development contributions

The Fiji Case Study alumni cohort comprised six women and two men who have worked across all areas of the education spectrum in Fiji – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. **They have made significant contributions to education policy and practice.** These include:

- setting national education agendas, including developing the education chapter of the Fiji 20 Year National Development Plan
- developing the first National Special Education Policy and leading Pacific Regional disability advocacy
- improving education information management through using mobile phone technology to record essential data in real time aiding disaster preparedness
- developing the first National Early Childhood Curriculum for Fiji and advocating for evidenced based approaches to early childhood education.

Some of the alumni in this cohort have made substantive, but somewhat *unrecognised*, contributions within their specific fields of education. This is because they largely worked as practitioners: as teachers, school leaders, or in student-facing support roles, improving education quality and access and preparing students to lead productive lives. Colleagues of these alumni confirmed the life-changing impact of their work, which has not been celebrated, but is no less important.

The success of the alumni was based on many factors: the transferrable skills they gained while studying in Australia; their new world view or perspective on problems and their changed mindset; **and a commitment to return to Fiji and improve the lives of others.**

However, there were also factors that challenged alumni in making positive development contributions, such as the lack of reintegration plans; lack of communication with Australian institutions about award rules and regulations; and the status of their sector or area of specialisation: **much advocacy was needed to convince others of the value of change.**

Economic and public diplomacy outcomes

While examples of development outcomes were prevalent and strong, as above, **examples of alumni using skills, knowledge and networks gained on award to contribute to bilateral cooperation and partnerships were less apparent.** This could be explained in part by the time lapse between the award and this Case Study.

Nonetheless, there were some examples of bilateral cooperation and partnerships, which included a formal institutional partnership between the University of the South Pacific and Deakin University, strong sector-based networks maintained through conferences and visits,

and meaningful contact with alma mater and Australian employers from alumni's time in Australia. This has allowed alumni to stay abreast of new developments and approaches in their sector. Overall, it was noted that the **most active links between alumni and Australian people or organisations were informal.**

The key factors that supported alumni to develop networks and partnerships were **Australia Awards fellowships**, which provided opportunities to build new or strengthen existing partnerships and networks, and **Australian institutions, when their contact with alumni was relevant and meaningful.** The factors that challenged alumni's ability to maintain networks or establish partnerships were the lack of contact with the Australian Government and a lack of Fiji-based alumni associations.

Views about Australia and Australian expertise

Alumni in the Fiji Case Study **generally held very positive views about Australia, Australians, and Australian expertise.** Their views on Australia, however, were not derived entirely from their experiences on award, but rather from a range of sources:

- experiences studying in Australia on an Australian Government-funded scholarship
- experience working in Australian organisations, and on DFAT-funded aid programs
- from their previous experiences of studying in Australia.

Alumni provided strong examples of how their views about Australian expertise were applied in professional contexts. Alumni's positive views were enacted through sourcing Australian expertise for particular roles, or applying theories and practices learned in Australia in their work in Fiji.

Impact of Australia Awards on investment priorities

Fiji Case Study alumni provided **strong evidence to support the claim that targeting particular groups such as women and people with disabilities for scholarships has positively impacted their careers.** Alumni stated that they were able to progress much further than would have been possible without this support. Alumnae described how the Australian Government's generous allowances and family support underpinned their successful scholarship completion. In fact, for one alumnus, access to university in Fiji was not possible at the time of receiving an Australian Government scholarship, as universities in Fiji did not provide disability support services as a means of accessing tertiary education.

The key factors that enabled alumni from targeted investment priority areas to succeed were: **stipends that allowed families to travel to Australia together, and access to disability support services.** The key factors that challenged alumni from targeted investment priority areas to succeed were **specific cultural and systemic barriers in the workplace, and entrenched attitudes and bias toward particular groups such as women and people with disabilities.**

Fiji Case Study participants identified a number of barriers to targeting particular disadvantaged groups for scholarships. They were cited as: the societal and family expectations of women and women's roles, societal and family expectations and beliefs about the capability of people with disabilities, and appropriate resourcing and services to address these specific needs by institutions.

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility Sri Lanka Alumni Case Study- Executive Summary

This report details the outcomes of a Case Study of Sri Lankan alumni of Australian development scholarships. Alumni in this Case Study completed their scholarships between the mid-1950s and the mid-1990s. This research was conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (the Facility).

Findings

Development contributions

Alumni involved in this Case Study have **substantially contributed** to the development of Sri Lanka over a period of more than 60 years; a number of examples stand out as notable contributions. These include:

- leadership in major national infrastructure projects, including a large nitrogen fertiliser plant, a national university halls of residence construction project, and contributions to industry projects involving petrol, sugar and cement refineries
- the establishment of post-graduate engineering programs in Sri Lankan universities (particularly in the largest technical university in the country, University of Moratuwa) that have further developed the skills and knowledge of the engineering workforce in the country
- leading change in areas of dam safety, solar power, venture capitalism and improved processes and management of contract law in the Sri Lankan construction industry.

A key factor enabling alumni in the Case Study to contribute to the achievement of development goals was the demand for engineering skills, knowledge and qualifications in Sri Lanka at the time of their return from scholarships.

A key factor that challenged the ability of alumni to contribute further was the Sri Lankan Civil War, which spanned over thirty years and for many, encompassed the majority of their working lives. The effect of the Civil War was most significant for the two Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae in this Case Study who came from conflict zones and were unable to return to Sri Lanka to live and work.

Economic and public diplomacy outcomes

Despite a desire to remain connected, alumni in this Case Study generally did **not have strong ongoing links** or networks with Australia. However, one alumnus who is now back in Australia has developed links and a memorandum of understanding between an Australian university and a Sri Lankan university.

Alumni experienced a number of challenges in maintaining or broadening their networks or partnerships. For example, sustaining Australia's interest in partnerships was seen as difficult – especially within universities. There was a perception among the alumni interviewed that without funding attached, ongoing partnerships were hard to establish with Australian universities and other organisations. Another significant challenge to achieving economic and public diplomacy outcomes was the impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War.

In the instances where some connection with Australia had been achieved, the key factors that enabled alumni to maintain or broaden their networks or partnerships included Australian

university alumni associations maintaining connection through newsletters and emails, and through friendships made with other Sri Lankans in Australia.

Views of Australia and Australian Expertise

Alumni in the Case Study held **very positive views about Australia**, Australians, and Australian expertise.

Most alumni had not known very much about Australia or had any links with Australia prior to their scholarship experience. Their views about Australia developed as a result of their academic experiences in Australia as well their exposure to Australian culture – of which many had fond memories.

Many of the alumni involved in this Case Study have applied Australian expertise in their work. This is most strongly exemplified in alumni who have pursued academic careers. These alumni continue to use examples of Australian engineering achievements in their lectures and during their supervision of doctoral students. The notes, books and journal papers collected in Australia while on award are treasured by these alumni.

Impact in addressing disadvantage

Targeted approaches to ensure gender equality and ethnic ratios in Australia Awards selection processes have **offered opportunities** to some alumni who otherwise would not have had the chance to study overseas.

Australia Awards alumnae and other women working in engineering interviewed in this Case Study, experienced or perceived there to be gender bias in the sector in Sri Lanka and in Australia. There was limited opportunity to fully investigate the impact of scholarships on women in this cohort as the two alumnae participants were also Sri Lankan Tamil. It appeared that being Tamil presented a greater barrier to their personal and professional lives than being female. The scholarship and degree from Australia provided these alumnae with opportunities to pursue careers outside of Sri Lanka, in Singapore, the UK and Australia.

As a result of the conflict in northern Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae were not able to return home. Despite this, they have remained in contact with their families and, in some cases, have supported them from Australia. These alumnae maintain connections with Sri Lanka as active members of the Australian-based diaspora.

When Case Study participants discussed the promotion and inclusion of people with disability, they highlighted recent changes to infrastructure and regulations to accommodate special needs in Sri Lanka. These include the improvement of footpaths to aid accessibility and the requirement of elevators in new buildings. However, they also noted that barriers such as cultural stigmas and access to mainstream education continue to impede people with disability from actively participating in activities that would develop capacity to apply for Australia Awards scholarships.

Another persistent barrier to improving opportunities for people through scholarships is the **rural–urban divide** that exists in Sri Lanka. Disadvantage in rural areas permeates many aspects of life, including educational opportunities. This Case Study identified that **English language education** is far less accessible for rural school students than those in the main cities. Given the importance of English in Australia Awards selection and in university requirements in Australia, this remains a barrier to the ability of the Australia Awards to have an impact on rural areas.

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility Kenya Alumni Case Study - Executive Summary

This report details the outcomes of a Case Study of Kenyan alumni of Australian development scholarships. Alumni in this Case Study completed their scholarships between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. This research was conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (the Facility).

Findings

Development contributions

Alumni have used their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to achieving Kenyan development goals in the areas of economic development, food security and environmental management. Not only did alumni understand and want to contribute to their country, they were able to:

- enhance the agricultural industry through establishing intellectual property rights in the agricultural sector and develop policy that impacted how farmers were trained in Kenya
- increase agriculture export and trade by establishing a regulatory body for plant health to support exports and imports into European and Middle Eastern markets
- increase food security by quadrupling crop yields and making fertiliser more accessible to farmers across Kenya by advocating for it to be sold in smaller quantities
- lead Kenya's wood protection activities to mitigate the economic and environmental impacts of deforestation
- train national and country officers to mainstream climate change into planning, policy and budgeting.

There were two key factors that enabled alumni to contribute to Kenya's development on award. First, they were able to **contribute by using their skills** on projects related to their degrees. Second, they were able to **source funding for their projects**. However, alumni also faced some key challenges. There was insufficient equipment to support their research; there was a lack of government funding for agricultural research; and, employers did not always know how to reintegrate alumni upon their return to Kenya.

Economic and public diplomacy outcomes

Alumni provided strong examples of long-term relationships developed through collaboration on research projects; professional links with Australia; and in the strengthening of networks through ongoing engagement with the Australian High Commission.

Factors that enabled alumni to maintain or broaden networks or partnerships were:

- the strong pre-existing relationship with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), which was built on long-term collaborative projects with a number of Kenyan research institutes.
- the commonalities in the agricultural challenges that face Kenya and Australia.

Factors that challenged alumni in maintaining or broadening their networks or partnerships were:

- the physical distance between Kenya and Australia
- the lack of opportunities to make professional relationships while on award, despite having established strong social ties
- the lack of follow-up from Australian institutions and government on return to Kenya after award.

Views of Australia and Australian Expertise

The Australia Awards have achieved their long-term outcome for these Kenyan alumni, who viewed Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively.

Before being granted their scholarships, the majority of alumni held **positive views** about Australia based on Australia's agricultural reputation. However, this view was strengthened because of their academic experience on award, the high calibre of Australian academics and research institutes that they encountered and their broader experience of Australian people, culture, healthcare and government institutions.

Positive views of Australia have filtered through to colleagues, supervisors and the wider Kenyan community. Stakeholders noted that Kenyan students now look to study at Australian institutions because of their education standards.

Impact in addressing disadvantage

Alumni in this Case Study were awarded scholarships in a period of substantial Australian Government investment in scholarships in Africa and have seen the benefits for a number of their peers. All alumni included in this Case Study benefited greatly from their scholarships and noted the impact on their careers.

For gender equality, the Case Study found that:

- while access to the scholarships was equal for men and women, there were few females in agriculture or science at the times when the Case Study cohort were on award in Australia
- women were far more likely than men to mention issues of balancing family and career responsibilities in their decision to accept scholarships, during their time on award, and in their careers on return to Kenya.

In relation to disability inclusiveness, the Case Study found that:

- there was positive endorsement of the efforts of the Australia Awards to promote disability inclusion, but also a caveat that finding eligible applicants was a challenge
- one alumna's hearing impairment was not a barrier to them achieving substantial outcomes and they now work to make an impact on disability inclusiveness in Kenya.

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility Nepal Alumni Case Study- Executive Summary

This Nepal Case Study is the **fourth and final Case Study** undertaken during year one of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT), Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (the Facility), launched in May 2016.

Findings

Development contributions

The Nepal Case Study alumni cohort comprised three females and six males who collectively have worked across numerous ministries of the Government of Nepal including those that are now called Foreign Affairs; Forests and Soil Conservation, General Administration; Health and Population; Physical Infrastructure and Transportation; Tourism, Civil Aviation, and Culture; Urban Development; and Women, Children and Social Welfare. They provided clear examples how they had used the skills, knowledge and networks gained during their time in Australia to contribute to partner-country development goals. Given the nature of the cohort, these examples are diverse and difficult to collate and categorise, but could conceivably be divided into outcomes related to **policy development and implementation** and **program or project based solutions**. Examples include:

- improving health outcomes for thousands of rural Nepali women through the provision cervical cancer screening and awareness raising
- fostering understanding about the value of evidence-based planning based on population information culminating in the formation of the Ministry of Population and Planning
- effective international diplomatic efforts including establishing bilateral relations and posts, increasing trade and aid, and effectively representing Nepali citizens in crisis
- improving the quality and efficiency of services provided within the then Ministry of Civil Aviation
- extending the effect of Australian assistance via the Nepal-Australia Forestry Project through the effective implementation of forest conservation policy
- designing and implementing environmentally sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) programs including in Nepal, benefiting 1.7 million people in 70 towns.

A standout feature of the Nepal Case Study was that **all alumni participants were clearly exceptional individuals**. Their intelligence and dedication to service was unmistakable and they all placed high value on ethics in the workplace. For the Case Study researchers, this made attributing their success specifically to the Australia Awards a challenge, but what was certain was that the **Australian Government had selected very high quality candidates 20 years ago**. Other factors that underpinned alumni's success in contributing to partner-country development goals were:

- **the longevity of the skills and knowledge** gained in Australia. Many alumni were drawing upon their skills gained in Australia after retirement in their consulting or volunteer work. The benefit of this to the Government of Nepal and Government of

Australia is that valuable human resources are still being utilised, extending the investment made in these individuals

- **practical (work-based) and transferrable skills** gained in Australia enabled alumni to be more effective, provide better advice and ultimately improve the quality of their work. Alumni reported being more employable or 'transferrable' within the civil service due to having these skills
- the expertise gained in Australia resulted in extensive recognition and increased opportunities over the life of alumni's skills, **particularly for those who had undertaken doctorate degrees.**

Some of the factors that challenged alumni in contributing to partner-country development goals were that alumni lacked support at the time to reintegrate to their workplaces, and some worked in environments that were not conducive to change.

Economic and Public Diplomacy Outcomes

While Nepal Case Study alumni participants provided some good examples of collaboration and partnerships developed between Australia and Nepal, many of the networks that underpinned past collaboration had elapsed as the years passed and alumni retired. The most significant examples of impact regarding the long-term economic and public diplomacy outcomes of the Australia Awards were:

- the establishment of the **250-member Association of Nepalese Alumni from Australia (ANAA)** in 1998 by a core group of alumni, which has maintained links between alumni and Australians in Nepal
- the work and achievements of ANAA including plans to commemorate Australia-Nepal relations
- **the environment network fostered by Ms Neeta Pokhrel** which has resulted in sourcing Australian utilities staff to work on Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded programs
- **the work of Australian Embassy staff and alumni** in fostering positive diplomatic relations via the Australia Awards
- **the Australian academic network of Dr Prakash Pant**, who now has permanent family links to Australia.

Some of the factors that enabled alumni to maintain networks and foster partnerships and collaboration between Australia and Nepal included ANAA; most alumni interviewed for this Case Study were members and active within the organisation; the course they studied, some of which were more conducive to building strong networks; and the sector in which they worked, two of which provided stronger foundations to build partnerships, namely development and academia.

The factors that challenged alumni to maintain networks and foster partnerships and collaboration were: the lack of support in Australia to build relationships due to the demands of the course or lack of opportunity provided by the institution; the time elapsed since studying in Australia; and the divergent views on the appropriate role and services that could be provided by ANAA. Some alumni reported that an audit or survey of alumni member needs and capacity would be useful to consolidate views.

Views about Australian and Australian expertise

All alumni in the Nepal Case Study reported positive views of Australia and Australian expertise, providing evidence that **this long-term outcome of the Australia Awards has been achieved.**

Alumni's views about Australia were derived from multiple sources and only a few held preconceived views based on prior experience or word of mouth. Some alumni maintained or

transmitted their positive views through ongoing contact with Australians or as part of their role in the workplace.

The positive views held by alumni inspired them to act in their workplace or community to share their knowledge or expertise. The major outcomes of these actions were changed workplace practices and policies and the establishment of ANAA.

The main factors that enabled the formation of these positive views were:

- **positive academic experiences**, and in particular, on arrival support via bridging courses
- **experiential learning** which transformed alumni resulting in long held positive views and memories
- **family support in Australia and positive views of the generous allowances** provided by the Australian Government.

Impact of Australia Awards on addressing equity issues

Case Study participants described the Nepal context as characterised by pervasive cultural and systemic barriers preventing the full participation in society by disadvantaged groups. Australia Awards play a small part in a broader program of change required to address issues of equity in Nepal. However some positive signs of progress exist, such as the increased participation of women in government. However, alumni reported that support is needed to ensure that women who are fast tracked into government are supported to succeed.

There were no alumni with disability available to participate in this Case Study. Case Study researchers were advised that the focus on disability has only eventuated in the past five years and there were simply no Australian scholarship alumni with disability more than 20 years ago.

The barriers that people with disability face to full participation in society were described by Case Study participants as attitudinal, cultural and systemic. Disability inclusiveness is an emerging area in Nepal and while policies and legislation is in place, many reported that is yet to be enacted.

Only three female alumnae participated in the Nepal Case Study. **All of them provided strong examples of how the Australia Awards have positively impacted their career** and provided them with the confidence to challenge discriminatory practices and behaviour.

One of the unique features of the Nepal Case Study is that **alumni themselves have acted to address issues of equity in various ways.** These included:

- **establishing the first active autism support organisation in Nepal**, connecting parents and those living with autism with services and treatment
- **leading the provision of health services for rural women**, and services and support for children with disability through non-government organisations (NGOs)

Some of the factors that enabled the Australia Awards to address issues of equity were: targeted programs that identified women working in particular industries; alumni's depth of knowledge and understanding about equity issues; and the generous family support provided to alumni via their Australian scholarship.

Some of the factors that challenged alumni and in turn the Australia Awards in addressing equity issues were: gender bias and discrimination experienced by alumna regarding their expertise; bias regarding the appropriate role of women in Nepalese society; and the health requirements for Australian visas which disadvantage many Nepali citizens.

