

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility

Case Study #2: Sri Lanka May 2017



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| AIDAB | Australian International Development Assistance Bureau |
|--------|---|
| APQRC | Australian Power Quality and Reliability Centre |
| AusAID | Australian Agency for International Development (former) |
| AWB | Australia Awards and Alumni Branch (DFAT) |
| CDIC | Capital Development and Investment Company |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| DAAD | Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service) |
| DFAT | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| IELTS | International English Language Test System |
| UNSW | University of New South Wales |

1. 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).

1.1 Findings

1.1.1 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.

1.1.2 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.

1.1.3 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.

1.1.4 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.

2. Background of the Study

The Facility is a four-year project funded by DFAT. Through this project, DFAT assesses the development contributions and public and economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment in the Australia Awards.¹ The key research and reporting activities being undertaken are a quantitative survey and qualitative Case Studies, which are prepared concurrently throughout the four years of the project.

This report gives the key findings of the Sri Lanka Case Study; the majority of the data collection for which was undertaken by the Facility in Sri Lanka in late November and early December 2016. Follow-up interviews were carried out after the in-country fieldwork and data collection was completed in early March 2017.

2.1 Objectives

The Facility seeks to generate high-quality information on former scholarship holders, with a focus on less recent alumni. This information will provide a strong evidence base for country programs and the Australia Awards and Alumni Branch (AWB) of DFAT to evaluate the impact of Australia Awards on alumni and, by implication, on their home institutions and countries.

2.2 Scope

The scope of the Facility is limited to alumni of DFAT's Australia Awards and previous DFAT-funded scholarships programs, awards (both long and short duration) and fellowships (managed by AWB).

2.3 Case Studies

The Case Studies are being conducted via an iterative approach whereby the qualitative phase can be designed based on what is learned from the initial quantitative phase.

The Facility Case Study methodology is explanatory and multiple in design. That is, cases are selected based on findings from the quantitative (survey) research, and the 'how' and 'why' of alumni experiences is explained in detail. Multiple Case Studies enable the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. Case Studies contribute to the evidence base for country programs, providing useful comparison across cases and Case Studies to build a robust understanding of diverse alumni experience.

2.3.1 Year 1

In this first year of the Facility, however, Case Study countries and themes were based on criteria such as availability and range of alumni details in the centralised database;

¹ See <u>http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/Documents/public-diplomacy-strategy-2014-16.pdf</u> and <u>http://dfat.gov.au/trade/economic-diplomacy/pages/economic-diplomacy.aspx</u>

previous country or thematic research undertaken; investment priorities, and partnercountry priorities. **The cohort for Year 1 Case Studies are alumni who graduated between 1952 and 1995.** Case Studies will provide useful vignettes and quotes to build an understanding of alumni experiences. In Year 1, the selected Case Study countries are Fiji, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Kenya. Field research took place between late October 2016 and March 2017.

2.3.2 Years 2–4

Subsequent Case Studies in Years 2–4 will be determined through the annual planning process. Case Studies will not be limited to geographic foci, and may be sectoral or regional as determined through findings of the annual Tracer Survey and planning and consultation process. Case Studies will also align with the priorities identified in the Global Strategy, and any other areas of importance as identified by AWB.

2.4 Country context

Sri Lanka is an island located in the Indian Ocean, with a population of approximately 21 million people. The country is considered a 'lower middle-income' country according to the World Bank, and progressively moving towards its aspiration of becoming a 'higher middle-income' economy.² While country's rural, agricultural economy is still relatively large, there has been a shift in the past decade towards a more service-oriented economy.

Ending in 2009, a major Civil War in Sri Lanka had a substantial impact on the prosperity of the country, spanning three decades and having particular impact on the Northern and Eastern areas of the country, predominantly populated by the Sri Lankan Tamil minority group. For most of the alumni involved in this Case Study, the Civil War occurred in the middle of their careers. As discussed in the report, the impact of this on outcomes was notable for a number.

Following the end of the Civil War, Sri Lanka's economic growth has been considerable as it continues to build infrastructure and reduce poverty in rural areas. According to the current Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the two major social challenges for Sri Lanka's future are "promoting reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas afflicted by the conflict" and "bolster Sri Lanka's democracy by...reasserting the independence of the judiciary, combating bribery with the UN Convention Against Corruption and allowing a free and vibrant press to flourish".³

² The World Bank (2017), *Sri Lanka Country Overview*, retrieved from: <u>http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/overview</u>

³ Wickremesinghe, R. (2016), *The future of Sri Lanka's economy*, World Economic Forum, Davos, retrieved from: <u>https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-future-of-sri-lanka-s-economy/</u>

3. Methodology

This chapter includes an overview of the Case Study design, development and implementation. This Sri Lanka Case Study is the second Case Study of the Facility. Sri Lanka was one of four Case Study countries proposed in the Annual Plan Year 1 and was accepted by the Facility Advisory Committee on the basis of having sufficiently large alumni numbers – particularly in engineering, a sector involved in substantial infrastructure development for the country in recent decades – and a lack of previous research regarding less recent alumni.

3.1 Overall Case Study design

The purpose of the Facility Case Studies is to collect detailed qualitative data on the impact and benefits of the Australia Awards. The Case Study methodology proposed is based on the Facility Case Study Approach, which was developed in the inception phase of the Facility and reported in the Annual Plan for Year 1.

The Global Strategy and Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework form the basis for the Case Study design. The research questions, propositions, data collection instruments, and report template are built around these frameworks. Findings reported by alumni are triangulated with relevant stakeholders such as employers and colleagues, and industry bodies thereby strengthening findings by providing further evidence to support or refute propositions. This methodology was developed by the Facility and AWB.

The overarching theory that has guided the design of this Case Study methodology is based upon the goal of the Australia Awards that '... partner countries progress their development goals and have positive relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests'.

The Case Study research questions are framed by the intended long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards as guided by the Framework:

- 1 How do alumni use the skills, knowledge and networks gained on award to contribute to achieving partner-country development goals?
- 2 How are Australia Awards contributing to Australia's economic and public diplomacy outcomes?
- 3 How has being an Australia Award alumni impacted alumni?
- 4 Are the benefits of receiving a scholarship experienced equally by all groups who have received them?

The primary unit of analysis for this Case Study is the alumnus or alumna. Case Studies seek to explore how alumni of Australia Awards have acted to contribute to the achievement of the goal and objectives of the Australia Awards.

3.2 Methods

The data collection method used for this Case Study was key participant interviews. A set of questions were developed for each key participant group, namely alumni, colleagues and employers (both of alumni and generally), alumni associations; and the DFAT staff and managing contractors working on the Australia Awards in partner countries. Questions for each key participant group align with the research propositions (located at Annex 1) 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.

3.3 Sample and approach

Data available for Sri Lanka at the time of planning this Case Study revealed 721 alumni who completed their scholarship between 1952 and 1995; 148 studied in the field of engineering (117 men and 31 women), which formed the target group for this Case Study.

3.3.1 Contact details

Contact details existed in the Global Alumni database for only two of the 148 alumni in the target group. Several methods were used to find their contact details, which included coordinating with the Australian High Commission and the Australia Awards managing contractor in Colombo to compare databases, as well as substantial online searches using social media. As a result of these efforts, 15 alumni were contacted and of these seven responded and became part of the Case Study (5 men and 2 women). Four were currently located in Sri Lanka, while the other 3 now live in Australia. Table 1 lists the alumni participants in the Sri Lanka Case Study.

| Name | Gender | Australian Government scholarship | University | Award Completed | Current position |
|--|--------|--|--|--------------------|---|
| Dr Nalini* | F | Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) | University of Sydney | 1994 | Research – testing and verification |
| Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage | М | Colombo Plan scholarship | University of New South Wales | 1986 | Founder and Director of Sigma Delta Technologies |
| Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage | Μ | Colombo Plan scholarship | University of New South Wales and University of Wollongong | 1982 | Professor, School of Electrical, Computer and Telecommunications Engineering, University of Wollongong; Technical Director, Australian Power |

| Table 1 | Sri Lanka | Case | Study | alumni | partici | pants |
|---------|-----------|------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| | On Lanka | ouse | oluuy | alalini | partici | Junto |

| | | | | | Quality and Reliability Centre (APQRC) |
|--|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|---|
| Ms Selvi Jayaganesh | F | AIDAB | University of Melbourne | 1996 | Data Design Specialist, Commonwealth Bank, Sydney, Australia. |
| Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya | М | Colombo Plan scholarship | University of New South Wales | 1981 | Retired (December 2016), Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka |
| Mr Tennyson Rodrigo | М | Colombo Plan scholarship | University of New South Wales | 1957 | Retired (1999), Chemical engineer, former Managing Director and Chief Executive of Capital Development and Investment Company PLC |
| Mr Wijaya (U.W.) Rodrigo | М | Colombo Plan scholarship | University of New South Wales | 1992 | Consultant – Association of Consulting Engineers |

*Name has been changed at participant's request

In addition to the alumni who participated in the Case Study, nine other people were interviewed in order to provide context, triangulate alumni perspectives and better understand the impact of the Australian scholarships on the outcomes for Sri Lanka and Australia. These additional interviews included current stakeholders such as the Australian High Commission in Colombo and the managing contractor of the Australia Awards South and West Asia, as well as bodies such as the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka and the Colombo Plan Secretariat. Where possible and available, colleagues of alumni were also interviewed to gather further information about the impact of the alumni. Table 2 lists these participants. In total, 16 people were interviewed for the Sri Lanka Case Study.

Table 2 Key stakeholder and employer/colleague interviews

| Name | Position | Reason for interview |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Dr Jagath Peiris | Chief Executive Officer, Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka | Key stakeholder (engineering in Sri Lanka) |
| Dr Kumari Fernando | Dean, Faculty of Engineering, General Sir Kotelawala Defence University | Colleague of alumnus Dr Wickramasuriya |
| Dr Upuli Jayatunga | Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa | Colleague of alumnus Dr Perera |
| Mr Kinley Dorji | Secretary General, Colombo Plan Secretariat | Key stakeholder (scholarships history in Sri Lanka) |
| Ms Chandrika de Alwis | Former Manager, Australia Awards, Sri Lanka and Maldives DFAT – 1988 to ~2014 | Key stakeholder (former DFAT) |
| Ms Krishni Goonesena | First Secretary, Development Cooperation, Sri Lanka and Maldives, DFAT | Key stakeholder (current DFAT) |

| Ms Pubudu Gnanissara | Manager, Australia Awards, Sri Lanka and Maldives, DFAT | Key stakeholder (current DFAT) |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Mr Pieter Bossink | Operations Manager, Australia Awards South and West Asia | Key stakeholder (managing contractor, Australia Awards) |
| Ms Sajani Ranatunge | Country Program Manager, Sri Lanka, Australia Awards South and West Asia | Key stakeholder (managing contractor, Australia Awards) |

3.4 Data collection

The Facility piloted all Case Study instruments with Australia Awards alumni who resided in Australia. This process validated the instruments and adaptions to questions were made. In addition, an interview guide template for researchers to record all data collected was developed and utilised.

This Case Study was conducted by Dr Daniel Edwards and Ms Amanda Taylor, core Facility staff who bring relevant expertise in qualitative research and international development. Case Study researchers worked together in pairs to undertake data collection and report writing: one conducted the interview and the other recorded and took notes. This enabled high-quality reliable data to be gathered. At the conclusion of interviews, the researchers discussed and verified the data to ensure completeness and accuracy.

3.5 Process

The Case Study field research was undertaken in Sri Lanka from 30 November to 9 December 2016; the majority of interviews were undertaken in Sri Lanka, although three alumni and one colleague were interviewed in Australia in January and February 2017 after the in-country fieldwork.

Interview participants were provided with background information relating to the research and the Facility, and all provided written informed consent to their participation.

No major issues were encountered during the data collection process; however, one individual incorrectly identified themselves as an alumni. This interview was ended amicably when the Case Study team realised the individual had not studied in Australia. It is proposed that requesting curricula vitae from alumni may mitigate this occurring again.

3.6 Data management and reporting

Fifteen interviews were voice recorded with approval granted to do so, while one interview was not recorded on audio at the request of the participant. In addition, the second Case Study researcher annotated responses during the interview. After the completion of the interview process, the Case Study researchers consolidated the written and oral recordings into a single near-verbatim transcript (with restarting of sentences and fillers excluded).

3.7 Transcription approval, coding and analysis

Completed interview transcripts and notes were sent back to each of the Case Study participants for their review and approval, to ensure that what was recorded was correct and to provide participants with an opportunity to clarify and/or add to their transcripts.

Transcript review by participants is not consistently used in qualitative research, but was done so here as a courtesy, and to ensure the validity of the data and avoid errors. Participants were advised at the end of the interview that they would be given this opportunity, but participation in this step was not essential to proceed with using their data as permission had already been granted. The researchers provided alumni with ample time to respond and follow-up requests were sent. Four of the seven alumni provided feedback on the transcripts, offering minor edits and clarifications of names. In addition, stakeholders from DFAT and from the Australia Awards South and West Asia team reviewed their transcripts, also offering minor edits and clarifications of names.

It was assumed that non-response related to the participant's high-ranking position and lack of time to review up to 15 pages of text. Indeed, when participants responded to follow-ups, this is the reason they provided.

Interview scripts were subsequently coded in a template in accordance with the research questions and propositions. This enabled emerging themes to be identified and links to be made between participants that supported or refuted the research propositions.

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 Facility's Case Study Approach document. Researchers used analytic techniques such as pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models and cross-case synthesis to explore all the evidence, and show adequate concern for exploring alternative interpretations.

3.8 Limitations

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

3.8.1 Positive response bias

It is probable that alumni who felt that they had a positive experience as an Australian Government scholarship recipient and/or that they had met the expectations of receiving an award during their career progress are more likely to agree to participate in Case Studies. In a study by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, 'A study of research methodology used in evaluations of international scholarship schemes for higher education'⁴ the recognition of positive response bias was 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

⁴ Mawer, M (2014), A study of research methodology used in evaluations of international scholarship schemes for higher education, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, retrieved from: <u>http://cscuk.dfid.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/evaluation-research-</u> <u>methodology-study.pdf</u>, pp. 9 -10

engaged with alumni associations or tracing (e.g. Day, Stackhouse and Geddes, 2009⁵) and disproportionately represent the 'successful' outcomes of scholarship programmes.⁷⁶

In addition, positive response bias that is likely to occur in the Case Study results as alumni participating is limited to those who can be traced, and those who choose to participate which typically tends to be those with positive outcomes to share.⁷

Accordingly, it is likely that the sample of alumni in the Sri Lanka Case Study was biased towards those who had positive experiences and achievements to share. Conversely, it is reasonable to assume that those who exited their bond agreement early and/or have moved abroad may be less likely to agree to participate. However, the Case Study team endeavoured to address this imbalance by including a range of alumni. The Sri Lanka Case Study includes three alumni who moved abroad to work, two of whom did not return to Sri Lanka post-award, and one who exited early and graduated with a different (lesser) degree level.

3.8.2 Nature of the research

Outcome 1 of the Global Strategy is that 'alumni are using the skills, knowledge and networks gained on award to contribute to achieving partner-country development goals'. However, some alumni have shaped development goals rather than contributed to them, and while it may be outside the purview of partner-country development goals that this research is being evaluated against, such contributions are still significant.

The Case Study researchers experienced difficulty in evaluating Outcome 2 'alumni are contributing to *cooperation* between Australia and partner countries', and Outcome 3 'effective, mutually advantageous *partnerships* between institutions and business [have been developed] in Australia and partner countries'. These two outcomes are aligned with the second research question for the Case Study 'How are Australia Awards contributing to Australia's economic and public diplomacy outcomes?' There is an overlap and difficulty in differentiating 'cooperation' and 'partnerships'. The research team delineated them by determining that Outcome 2 relates to people-to-people links including informal relationships; whereas Outcome 3 specifically relates to institutional links between the partner-country and Australia, which alumni have contributed to establishing.

No issues were encountered by the research team in collecting, collating, coding or analysing data related to Outcome 4 of the Australia Awards. Outcome 4 is 'Alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively'.

3.8.3 Research process

The ability to code the interview transcripts effectively was dependent on understanding the partner-country development goals at the time during which alumni received their scholarships, which was not always possible. As such, understanding country

⁵ Day, R., & Geddes, N. (2008), *Evaluating the impact of Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom: Results of the alumni survey*, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

⁶ Mawer, M (2014), A study of research methodology used in evaluations of international scholarship schemes for higher education.

⁷ ibid

development goals and priorities were guided by the objectives stated by DFAT and various country and donor reports available.⁸

⁸ http://dfat.gov.au/geo/sri-lanka/Pages/sri-lanka.aspx

4. Development Outcomes

Summary findings

Development contributions

Alumni involved in the Sri Lanka Case Study have contributed substantially to Sri Lanka's development over a period of more than 60 years. Specific examples of this included involvement in major infrastructure projects, which have been pivotal to Sri Lanka's development, as well as the establishment of engineering programs in Sri Lankan universities.

Key enabling factor

• The key factor that enabled the alumni in the Sri Lankan Case Study cohort to contribute to the achievement of partner-country development goals was the demand for engineering skills, knowledge and qualifications at the time of their return from scholarships.

Key challenging factor

• A key factor that limited the ability of alumni to make further contributions was the Sri Lankan Civil War, which spanned thirty years. For many, this period encompassed the main part of their careers. The effect of the Civil War was most significant for the two Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae who were from conflict zones and unable to return to Sri Lanka to live and work after their period of study in Australia.

4.1 Background

The design of the Facility includes two key premises that have been verified in this Sri Lanka Case Study⁹; namely that:

- less recent alumni have maximised the overseas study opportunity to its fullest extent and can potentially demonstrate the significant development and economic and public diplomacy contributions made by Australia Awards
- examples related to alumni development contribution provide the greatest potential for public diplomacy use.

As described previously, this Case Study focuses on alumni from Sri Lanka who received Australian Government-funded scholarships to study in Australia more than 20 years ago in the field of engineering. The alumni interviewed were able to discuss their contributions to Sri Lankan development, which spanned a period of 60 years. These contributions have been highlighted under two specific areas:

• the contribution to the development of specific infrastructure

⁹ See <u>http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/business-opportunities/tenders/Pages/investment-concept-for-the-australia-awards-global-tracer-facility-phase-1.aspx</u>

• the equipping of the next generation of Sri Lankan engineers with relevant skills and knowledge.

The chapter presents a selection of significant contributions made by alumni, and a discussion of the factors that have enabled or challenged alumni in their endeavours to contribute to Sri Lanka's achievement of their national development goals.

4.2 Alumni contributions

4.2.1 Context

Since the late 1950s, infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka have been significant and engineers have played a key role. When Dr Jagath Peiris, Chief Executive of the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka was asked to list some of the most important engineering projects over the past 60 years, he highlighted a number of key examples:

There are several projects, old projects. One example is our large irrigation project [The Mahaweli Project]. Now in Colombo, there are a lot of high-rise buildings, 15 years ago we hardly had any... Also roads, we never had expressways but over the last three to four years there's a lot being constructed. For centuries, there was only one port, and now we have a port down south. And we have an international airport. We couldn't have done it all without having engineering expertise.

As the discussion below shows, a number of the alumni involved in the Sri Lanka Case Study worked directly on these projects.

In addition to the human resource contribution to the development of infrastructure through the scholarships of these alumni, it is also important to contextualise the role of the Colombo Plan. The Colombo Plan contributed to these significant infrastructure projects – particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s. The Colombo Plan itself involved the contribution of capital funding to many large infrastructure projects. It was the combination of this capital finance alongside the development of a scholarship program that meant not only was there funding for infrastructure, but there was a workforce of skilled professionals to implement the projects.

To further demonstrate this, in another 'list' of significant projects the former President of Sri Lanka, H. E. Mahinda Rajapaksa notes in his introduction to a book produced by the Colombo Plan Secretariat:

In Sri Lanka, the Colombo Plan was responsible for a number of major infrastructure projects such as the Colombo International Airport, Colombo Port, Kelaniya Bridge, the Gal Oya project, Laxapana Hydro Scheme, Colombo Thermal Power Plant and the Victoria and Randenigala reservoirs, to name a few, while contributing to develop our human capital.¹⁰

¹⁰ Colombo Plan Secretariat, (2010), A Legacy of Excellence, The Story of the Colombo Plan.



Figure 1: Colombo Plan Memorial and Colombo Town Hall

4.2.2 Building significant infrastructure for Sri Lankan development

The career pathway of alumnus **Mr Tennyson Rodrigo**, who studied chemical engineering during his scholarship, offers a specific example of the way in which alumni have contributed directly to development in their country. Mr T Rodrigo was a Colombo Plan scholar in only the second year of the program (1952) who returned to Sri Lanka from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in 1957.

On his return to Sri Lanka, Mr T Rodrigo took a job in the Department of Industries where he was part of a team made up of engineers from a range of disciplines. He was the only one with expertise in chemical engineering (a discipline not taught at that time). His work in the department over a decade from the mid-1950s involved 'planning a whole host of industry projects: sugar, cement, petrol refinery, fertiliser, iron and steel, and so forth'. Two particular achievements in the public sector included leading the planning and building of a major petrol refinery and managing the planning and construction of a large nitrogen fertiliser plant that was 'the largest single industrial project in the country at the time in terms of money', and which he identified as his proudest career achievement.

After his public sector service, Mr T Rodrigo moved into the private sector and used his skills with the Bank of Ceylon. In this role, he led a team that evaluated small- and medium-scale projects in Sri Lanka for financing. This led to a number of other career-defining activities. He had a foundational role in the development of the Merchant Bank of Sri Lanka, leading an area 'with a larger role of providing financing for projects and developing capital markets'. He also became the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a new venture capital company he designed for the Sri Lankan National Development Bank, known as the Capital Development and Investment Company (CDIC). This involved a team of engineers, financial analysts and accountants who worked together to identify new capital opportunities for Sri Lanka.

Mr T Rodrigo retired in 1999, but the company continues to operate in the manner in which he designed it. Speaking of the time of his retirement, he noted that 'I had become the father of venture capital in Sri Lanka [laughing], and we privatised several state-owned companies by offering shares for sale on the stock market'.

Mr T Rodrigo emphasised that across his career, he specifically used the skills and knowledge he gained in Australia to develop his career, himself as a person and to contribute to Sri Lanka. From a **technical** aspect, his scholarship provided elements critical to his achievements (particularly in the public sector):

... was able to understand all the basic fundamentals of equipment that was being used, pressure vessels, pumps, cooling towers etcetera. So that was very relevant for me, and I thought that if I had not done chemical engineering I wouldn't have been able to do as well as I did.

Mr T Rodrigo also highlighted strongly (and in close accord with many of the alumni interviewed) that in addition to the technical aspects of his course, his Australian experience taught him new ways of thinking that he could apply in his approach to a project, and skills in communication and personal interaction to manage projects. He emphasised that it was these **management, communication and critical thinking skills** that were integral to his ability to be a leader throughout his career.

He gained these skills from his time at UNSW while undertaking compulsory humanities subjects that all engineering students were required to undertake:

... we were required to do humanities, which was a delightful thing. I loved the fact that from the very beginning there was a subject called humanities and we had lecturers who taught us a few basic concepts about the nature of the state, logic, psychology, history, literature. They were not in great detail, most of the Aussie colleagues of mine didn't like having it at all, but I loved it.

Another alumnus, **Mr Wijaya Rodrigo** also highlighted the way in which he meticulously used the skills acquired through his scholarship to achieve a range of outcomes – both within engineering and beyond.

Mr W Rodrigo undertook his Master of Engineering degree at a point later in his career than many of the others in this Case Study cohort. He had already made some contributions to the development of Sri Lanka through his engineering work, his undergraduate degree gained in Sri Lanka and the 'charter' he achieved through the London-based Institution of Engineers. Working for the Department of Buildings as a civil engineer, Mr W Rodrigo was involved in large projects such as the Mahaweli Development Program and the construction of the only multi-storey buildings in Sri Lanka.

During his career in the public service in the mid-1970s and 1980s, Mr W Rodrigo became increasingly aware of the potential problems arising from relatively unprofessional construction contracting, and poor project management practices in the industry.

When the opportunity to study overseas was presented to him by the Department of Buildings, Mr W Rodrigo scoured the available resources to find a course that would equip him with the knowledge and tools that he knew Sri Lanka needed. He found such a course at UNSW in Sydney and was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship to study there in the early 1990s. The content from this course, Mr W Rodrigo explained,

exposed him to the key things he had been looking for. He particularly emphasised the practical understanding provided by studying the outcomes of the Royal Commission into the Australian Building and Construction Industry, which had occurred around the time of his study:

[At the time of my study at UNSW, the] report of the Commission was out, it is a huge report ... [and it described] what we are trying to practice page by page, chapter by chapter, everything. One day we had the opportunity of getting one of the people who was involved in preparing that [the Report]. He gave a two-hour lecture and explained everything. It was fantastic.

In addition to the exposure to the working examples, Mr W Rodrigo also gained experience in project simulation software, which was relatively new technology at the time. With the experience, skills, knowledge and confidence he gained from this exposure in Australia – 'I got the courage ... because of my exposure there [in Australia]' – Mr W Rodrigo was able to continue his career. He contributed to the development of professional approaches, processes and management of contract law in Sri Lankan building projects. He introduced networking technology, connecting the Department of Buildings and construction sites of major infrastructure projects that vastly improved communication and project management. Mr W Rodrigo also led a major infrastructure project to construct university student accommodation in all eleven public universities in Sri Lanka, which required direct and ongoing access to the minister for education and to university vice-chancellors.

The last of these examples was a project Mr W Rodrigo highlighted as his most significant achievement. It was a five-year project that was undertaken on politically volatile university campuses across the country. He was required to draw on the skills that he developed in Australia in order to successfully complete the project. Mr W Rodrigo specifically emphasised that he applied a combination of the skills he learnt while on his scholarship: **project management, communication skills, and diplomacy and contract law**. An example of the way he used these skills was in helping the university students to understand the project and permit it to continue without incident.

When I started, the students were rioting... What I did was, I educated the students in that light [on the process we needed to go through to get the project completed]. I said 'if I get the Cabinet approval that means your project is through [will be completed], don't worry'. So that was my achievement.

By the time he retired, Mr W Rodrigo had reached the highest level of the public service. His final work was his contribution to the technical education of the next generation of engineers – developing their awareness and skills in project management and contract law.

Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya's contribution to the development of Sri Lanka offers a further insight into the role the Colombo Plan scholarships have played in engineering in Sri Lanka. Dr Wickramasuriya, a long-serving academic in the country's largest technological university – the University of Moratuwa – had a significant role in developing the engineering qualifications in Sri Lanka (discussed in more detail in the next section), while also maintaining strong industry and practical links with the engineering profession.

I feel like I have been able to make contributions across industry, education ... academic research and industrial research. I have really tried to balance my contribution out across all these areas.

On Dr Wickramasuriya's particular area of expertise, dam safety, he has:

- advised on safety review panels
- provided expert advice on the work of consultants developing substantial infrastructure projects
- developed and run professional development workshops for engineers to improve their abilities in statistical modelling and risk assessment.

Dr Wickramasuriya highlighted that the Sri Lankan engineering sector relied on the skills he gained through his time in Australia. A particular example of this was his work in probabilistic statistics and risk analysis; critical elements of his scholarship doctoral work at UNSW.

Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage, was another Colombo Plan scholarship alumni in the field of electrical engineering, who contributes and continues to push for greater development of Sri Lanka's solar power capabilities. After a career as an academic at the University of Moratuwa, Mr Banunusinghage now runs his own company, which focuses mainly on solar energy and supplying technology to better harness this power: 'we handle high-end, high-tech instruments. We generally import, supply, service, and provide maintenance aspects.' This work links with current development policies in this area, as Mr Banunusinghage noted:

The government has launched this 'Battle for Solar', harnessing solar energy for national development and to cut down the greenhouse gas emissions ... *[but]* there are still many parts on the island where we are not harnessing the sunlight effectively.

The Australian influence on Mr Banunushinghage's career came from the knowledge he gained from studying alongside some of the world's leading electrical engineers in this area while studying at UNSW. He said:

We are working in this area of renewable energy, particularly the solar portable technology, for which I think the Australians are world-dominating currently. Particularly at the University of New South Wales, led by Professor Martin Green. I think there is an Australian national honour to him, so he is regarded as one of the leading academic experts.

In addition to this, Mr Banunusinghage attributed the 'holistic approach to thinking' he learnt in Australia as a critical element in undertaking his work in Sri Lanka. 'Even now in engineering, what is lacking is holistic thinking. That I got from the Australian education.' His emphasis on this aspect of his scholarship experience is shared with all of the Sri Lankan alumni involved in the Sri Lanka Case Study.

4.2.3 Equipping Sri Lanka with skills to train the next generation of engineers

Alumni from Australian scholarships have played an important role not only in engineering infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka but also in developing and nurturing the generation of engineers that will follow them. As a context to this achievement, Dr Peiris noted:

Almost 35 to 40 years ago, [Sri Lanka] only had at that time 300 to 350 people graduating as engineers [each year] and now it is around 3000 because there's that demand. Graduates are now able to find employment, and good employment. [This capacity] is also built by people coming back from overseas. It's the demand of a developing country trying to become middle-income category, which means a lot of infrastructure projects for us.

After their scholarships, three of the alumni played a direct role in educating Sri Lankan engineers. Each of their contributions is summarised below.

Dr Wickramasuriya was in the process of retiring from a 40-year academic career with the University of Moratuwa when this Sri Lanka Case Study was undertaken. After completing his doctorate at UNSW in 1981, Dr Wickramasuriya's first task when he returned as an academic to Moratuwa was to begin to develop the first master's program in engineering (in applied hydrology). He noted that 'at the time Sri Lanka was not offering this kind of training [post graduate level qualifications] in engineering'. This was one of the main reasons why he himself took up a scholarship to study overseas; without it, he would not have been able to advance in his career.

The development of this course drew directly on the knowledge, experience and examples that he had gained while on scholarship:

I could make a list of 40 references in half an hour. I was so familiar with the literature, the latest publications etc. [because of my exposure to this in Australia] it was very helpful. I am grateful for the opportunities here and the training received at UNSW.

The influence of his Australian scholarship on the development of this course was also highlighted by one of his former students, Dr Kumari Fernando:

Dr Wickramasuriya had several Case Studies, which he designed based on his Australian experience, he used Australian rainfall data and design handbooks. He took all those things and explained how they were developed. He taught us so many designs practices in hydrology, they were not only about Australia though, but he wanted to teach us how to compare this in a Sri Lankan scenario. He taught us how to change [this information] and how to apply it in Sri Lanka.



Figure 2:Dr Wickramasuriya (far right) and his first class of Masters
students. University of Moratuwa 1985



Figure 3:Dr Wickramasuriya (second from right) and some current
postgraduate students. University of Moratuwa, December 2016

In addition to consolidating his course in applied hydrology, Dr Wickramasuriya also assisted in the development of masters programs in other areas of engineering, collaborating with fellow academics to develop a solid program for engineering education in Sri Lanka that had not existed previously.

Dr Wickramasuriya then began to expand the capabilities of the university further, 'from my Masters [course development], I naturally pushed to doctoral level.' This again was a new innovation for the university and Dr Wickramasuriya drew heavily on the supervisory methods he had been exposed to during his doctoral studies in Australia. His former student, Dr Fernando, explained just how innovative and significant Dr Wickramasuriya's approach to the supervision of her doctorate was and highlights how she now applies these approaches to her own teaching of engineers:

Another experience I learnt from him that I'm still practicing is my approach to PhD supervision. He said to me at the beginning of my PhD 'In Australia, this is the way they teach, and guide their students'. It was a different approach to how things traditionally had been done in Sri Lanka for PhD supervision. He used this Australian experience to guide me, and I'm using a similar way for my students. The thing with him [that is different] is the gap between supervisor and student, I think at the end, we are not like friends, but I respect him.

Mr Banunusinghage, who now runs his own company (as discussed above), is another alumnus who has spent a considerable amount of his working life educating Sri Lanka's next generation of engineers. On his return from Australia in 1986, and over the following 30 years, Mr Banunusinghage worked in a number of Sri Lankan universities and colleges: 'I teach at the Institution of Engineers, and also the University of Vocational Technology, and Moratuwa. Earlier I used to teach at the Defence University'. The vast majority of this time as an academic was at the University of Moratuwa where he eventually became the Director of the Engineering Design Centre. During his interview, he was very clear in linking the teaching he undertook in Sri Lanka over his career with the foundation that was established during his scholarship. He identified not only the technical skills he learned in Australia as useful, but also the teaching skills he gained by being a tutor while on scholarship:

On the whole, I learned a lot [in Australia] and I transferred it to many students here when I was teaching ... As a scholarship student, we were allowed to do tutoring up to a certain number of hours. So then ... the knowledge that I gained from the lecturers who were there, I used to transfer it here and it was good ... Even today I can contribute when I teach.

Another alumnus, **Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage** (Dr Perera) has contributed to the skill development of Sri Lankans in a slightly different way to the other academics mentioned. Dr Perera has spent the majority of his career in Australia, as an academic at the University of Wollongong. Dr Perera's contribution to Sri Lankan development has come through the ongoing support and training of Sri Lankan students at his university. As discussed in more detail in chapter 6, Dr Perera has supervised dozens of Sri Lankan doctoral students over the past two decades who have come to Australia on scholarship, and who have then returned to Sri Lanka to work in universities or in industry as engineers.

One of his former students, now back in Sri Lanka – and connected with numerous of his previous students – believes Dr Perera's contribution has been substantial: 'His

expertise in that area is fairly commendable. He is a very humble professor. He used the opportunities in a good way and is giving back to Sri Lanka.'

4.3 Key enabling factors

There were a number of factors or experiences that enabled alumni to develop the requisite skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to the achievement of partner-country development goals.

4.3.1 The value of transferrable skills gained on award

The most commonly cited factor by alumni about what made it possible to contribute effectively to the development of Sri Lanka after their scholarships was that there was a desperate need for skills in Sri Lanka during the period the alumni undertook their scholarships. While this skill need seems to have been across many fields and industry sectors, engineering in particular was in dire need of people with strong professional qualifications during this period of substantial growth and as such, the skills that these alumni gained while in Australia were highly valued. As noted by Dr Wickramasuriya, there were no postgraduate-level engineering degrees in Sri Lanka until the early 1980s, when Sri Lankan's who has studied overseas began returning to develop courses.

As highlighted earlier, many of the major development projects in Sri Lanka over the past 50 years have specifically been engineering projects. Investment capital from international donors has contributed to construction, but without the human capital in Sri Lanka to implement these projects, the projects would not have happened.

Each of the four alumni in this Case Study who returned to Sri Lanka and remained there for their careers, mentioned the feeling of 'hitting the ground running' when they arrived back with new skills, knowledge and qualifications to offer.

The experiences of Mr T Rodrigo and Mr W Rodrigo are specific instances where the skills gained on scholarship became transferrable to a workforce that was in desperate need of such expertise. Mr W Rodrigo mentioned that the 'exposure to technology' made the difference for him – providing confidence to be able to contribute new ideas and new approaches immediately on return. In addition, Mr T Rodrigo mentioned a number of specific skills that helped him to become highly productive very quickly:

The overall approach to a project ... in terms of the development of the project, project management, and understanding for instance a nitrogen fertiliser plant, it's a very complex chemical engineering project. I feel that what I am today and what I became, as a result of my experience and evolution in the department as an engineer in the government was a product of that experience in Australia.

The cases of Dr Wickramasuriya and Mr Banunusinghage highlight that the severe need for these skills meant that those who went back to work in universities were able to achieve enormous success in building new qualifications and training Sri Lankans in their own country with the skills they had learned while on scholarship.

4.4 Key challenging factors

Some alumni faced difficulties and challenges when trying to shape or contribute to achieving partner-country development goals.

As mentioned in numerous parts of this report, the Sri Lankan Civil War was one of the key challenging factors in obstructing alumni in the Case Study cohort from making further contributions to development. The conflict continued for the time that many of the alumni were on scholarship, and did not cease until 2009. Three decades of civil war clearly impacted on the development of the country and the opportunities for some alumni to develop a career in Sri Lanka. Those most impacted were the Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae, **Ms Selvi Jayaganesh** and **Dr Nalini**.

Neither of these alumnae ever returned to Sri Lanka while on award. They followed the path of many Sri Lankan Tamil people of their generation who left Sri Lanka during the conflict. For them, it involved travelling to Singapore after their Australian scholarship, gaining a visa from the country's Economic Development Board, finding a job and remaining there before eventually travelling back to Australia (or in the case of other alumni from this cohort, the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada) to gain permanent residency. For these two Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae, the opportunities to contribute to the development of their country were significantly restricted (if not made impossible) as a result of the Civil War.

5. Economic and Public Diplomacy Outcomes

Summary findings

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

Key enabling factors

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

- Australian university alumni associations maintaining connection through
 newsletters and emails
- friendships built with others in the Sri Lankan community while in Australia.

Key challenging factors

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

- sustaining interest in partnerships especially within universities. The perception that without funding attached, ongoing partnerships were hard to establish with Australia
- the impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War this conflict prevented some alumni from returning home.

5.1 Background

Chapter 5 provides evidence to answer research question 2 of this Case Study: 'How are Australia Awards contributing to Australia's economic and public diplomacy outcomes?' This question relates to the following long-term outcomes of the Global Strategy, namely:

- alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries
- effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partnerships.

The interviews for this Case Study identified that all alumni interviewed developed informal links while in Australia. In particular, many alumni reported linking with and/or finding a sense of community through diaspora Sri Lankan and Sri Lankan Tamil communities in Australia, which played a significant role in integrating into student life in Australia.

However, there were a few examples of enduring professional links with Australians or Australian organisations that were apparent from the interviews.

These findings were similar to the outcomes identified in a 2015 study on recently returned Australia Awards alumni.¹¹ The 2015 study found limited evidence of ongoing professional networks between alumni and Australians or Australian organisations. Referencing this earlier study, one participant who previously managed the Australia Awards noted that this outcome was not necessarily expected: 'the [2015] study suggested that most Sri Lankans didn't maintain many contacts in Australia once they came home. They seemed to lose contact with Australia. For us, at the Australian High Commission, this was a surprise'.

This chapter examines the outcomes and experiences of a number of the Case Study alumni to provide insight into the factors that have **enabled linkages**, which offer some examples of beneficial relationships that have been made; and also the **challenges** experienced by alumni in developing or maintaining networks with Australia.

5.2 Factors enabling alumni to develop networks and partnerships

5.2.1 Key enabling factors

Australian institutions re-establishing or maintaining contact with alumni

Many Case Study alumni referred to Australian institution alumni engagement as an example of the main way in which they maintained a connection with Australia. In many cases, the involvement with their former Australian institution was passive – most alumni mentioned that they receive newsletters by mail or email occasionally. There was a sense from the interviews that this contact helped keep the alumni informed of what was going on (many noted that they actively read the news in the emails) but did not provide direct opportunities for specific or personal links they could pursue.

Given that the majority of the Case Study cohort had completed their degree before electronic communication became the norm, some of the alumni had only reconnected with their Australian institution in recent years. These reconnections tended to be instigated by their alma mater in Australia. For example, **Mr Tennyson Rodrigo** was 'discovered through a very circuitous route' by the UNSW in 2010 when it was making preparations for the 60th anniversary of the Colombo Plan. As Mr T Rodrigo noted, they found that 'I am still available, I am still alive! Following this reconnection, Mr T Rodrigo was invited to return to Sydney in 2010 for the anniversary celebrations, remarking that it was 'a renewal of everything'.

Strong connections with Australian institution staff

A number of alumni remarked positively on their relationships with supervisors and lecturers developed in Australia during their scholarship. Although not all links were sustained, for some alumni these are ongoing. **Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage's** (Dr Perera) supervisors were not only experts, but he was able to call upon for them research or teaching as he moved into his academic career, and they also facilitated the chance for him to return to Australia and take up a position at the University of Wollongong – where he has continued to teach and research ever since.

Dr Nalini offered another similar example of maintaining a connection. She was able to effectively utilise her relationship with her undergraduate project supervisor to facilitate

¹¹ DFAT (2015), *Case Study: Impacts of Disadvantage-related Awards in Sri Lanka*, Australia Awards South and West Asia.

further study and a doctoral scholarship in later years when she returned to Australia. While undertaking her doctorate, Dr Nalini found it relatively easy to secure tutoring work in the Australian institution because of the relationships she had forged years earlier during her Equity and Merit Scholarship.

Networks in reverse - alumni connecting with Sri Lanka from Australia

As noted earlier, the Sri Lankan alumni population is a highly mobile group. There are a number of factors for this, but perhaps the most significant is the impact of the civil conflict in the country which spanned three decades and was occurring during the time of study for a number of the alumni. This mobility has seen alumni move to all corners of the globe – among those within the target group, the data available suggested scholarship holders had eventually ended up in Canada, the United Kingdom and Singapore, as well as Australia and Sri Lanka. Three of the alumni involved in the interviews for this Case Study currently reside in Australia. The connections with Australia for these alumni are obviously strong and have been outlined in the cases of Dr Nalini and Dr Perera.

Dr Perera in particular provided a key example of how alumni who remained in (or have returned to) Australia have helped to foster and maintain links with Sri Lanka. As senior lecturer at the University of Wollongong, Dr Perera has developed strong links between his current university and the university in Sri Lanka in which he undertook his undergraduate studies.

Over the past decade, Dr Perera has helped to facilitate about 15 Sri Lankans to study postgraduate research courses at the University of Wollongong. He has done this by identifying available funding opportunities – usually partial scholarships with 'top-up' funding from internal university funds – and convincing his university of the merits of the students, and supervising these students in Wollongong.

Dr Upuli Jayatunga was one such student who was interviewed as part of the Sri Lanka Case Study. She highlighted the importance of the relationship that Dr Perera had been able to build between Australia and Sri Lanka. Her own connection to Dr Perera had been facilitated by a friend from Dr Jayatunga's time as an undergraduate and while she was the one who earned the scholarship, Dr Perera was supportive in helping to identify the opportunity. When in Australia he 'was like a family member' to Dr Jayatunga and her family.

Importantly, the ties that Dr Perera has made back in Sri Lanka as an academic are enduring – and certainly the most long-term example of networks identified in this Case Study. Dr Jayatunga and Dr Perera have recently secured an official Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Wollongong and the University of Moratuwa. A key outcome of this partnership is the development of a joint doctoral program. The first Sri Lankan student will begin their study by visiting the University of Wollongong in July 2017.

Dr Perera clearly articulated his feelings about this relationship and contribution from outside Australia:

My networks, I guess it's more than the networks of students I made from Sri Lanka, the networks that I established at Moratuwa University, even after I left, is something that I am really pleased with. Having the feeling that though I am not there, I am able to

contribute to the country. Not just Sri Lanka but I am also contributing to Australia as well. I am quite pleased with that.

Diaspora networks

Many of the alumni mentioned making strong connections with diaspora Sri Lankans and Sri Lankan Tamils in Australia. A number of alumni mentioned the housemates they had on scholarship (who were almost always fellow Sri Lankans) and the Sri Lankan community within Australia, which they became part of during their time in Australia. **Mr Wijaya Rodrigo** highlighted the large contingent of Sri Lankan students at UNSW as an element that helped him connect:

... lots of friends were there, they had migrated to Australia, and then most of them were staying around the university. They [were enrolled privately] and then I got the scholarship. It was like a Sri Lankan university classroom!

Similarly, Dr Nalini noted the strong links she found in Sydney: 'there was a Tamil community in Australia – Homebush – so we had those networks within the Tamil community'.

For some of the alumni, these informal networks have been ongoing. For example, **Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage** highlighted his ongoing relationships with friends who live in Australia that he made while on scholarship: 'I have my mates there in Melbourne and Sydney'.

Ms Chandrika de Alwis, who had decades of experience working on the scholarships programs from the Australian High Commission in Sri Lanka, sees the potential for these relationships to be fostered more strongly, suggesting that:

... there is a need for better ways to make links for the alumni. Perhaps there should be an association in Australia to help them to make the connections while in Australia because most alumni in the [previous] tracer study said that the people they met with and connected with while on Awards were Sri Lankan Australians and not so much Australians.

From Ms de Alwis' viewpoint, tapping more into Australia's diverse and multicultural communities and using this to more effectively help achieve economic and public diplomacy outcomes may be something to consider in the future.

This informal network with other Sri Lankans in Australia specifically helped Mr W Rodrigo to keep abreast of technological advances. Applications for new technology among like-minded friends were shared through informal email and online conversations, which he describes as:

... a technology transfer ... we will tell our problems for how we are doing things. [The group also] tell us how to recover these things with modern technology and that type of thing.

As a result of this network, Mr W Rodrigo was able to learn of the new applications in computer networking and applied this to his work, linking up computers between the office and the building sites. He felt this improved the working conditions and communications for his team who were working from remote areas.

Recent development of an alumni association

While there are limited examples of ongoing networks and relationships with Australia among the alumni in this Case Study, the future direction for such links looks promising. An alumni association, the Sri Lankan Association of Australia Awards Alumni is in its early stages of development. It is incorporated and registered and beginning to build engagement and alumni activities. The Australia Awards South and West Asia perceives alumni engagement and the Global Strategy to be a great opportunity for the Australia Awards to begin to forge genuine, long-lasting links and partnerships.

5.3 Challenges to developing networks and partnerships

As is apparent from the above discussion, the Sri Lanka Case Study found a limited number of examples that related to the development of long-term, ongoing networks between alumni and Australia. Some of the challenges articulated by Case Study participants in creating or maintaining these connections are discussed in this section.

5.3.1 Interest from Australia

Among the alumni interviewed who showed an active interest in fostering collaboration, links, and networks with Australia, there was an overall sense that it was very hard to attract attention and ongoing interest from Australia and Australian organisations. There was clear frustration at the inability to have made connections over the past few decades.

For example, **Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya** has continually tried to facilitate relationships with Australia through hydrology-related projects over the decades since his return from Australia with his doctorate. He provided examples of his efforts to instigate a visit supported by the former Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID at the time) by two professors on the use of imaging for farmers at a workshop held in Sri Lanka. He facilitated the services of Hydro Tasmania for conducting professional development among Sri Lankan engineers in dam and irrigation safety, using his membership on a national panel of experts in this area to procure these services.

However, despite these efforts at one-off events, he was unable to embed any longterm relationships or professional links with Australian organisations or Australian institutions. In his words, further opportunities 'never really materialised'. When asked about why he thinks this has not been possible, Dr Wickramasuriya stated that while he has not been able to 'point my finger and say this is it' he suspected 'the funding aspect is a big part of it ... it was a barrier ... the bottle neck'.

As a point of comparison, Dr Wickramasuriya contrasted his experience with German institutions and academics. He is currently building a number of collaborative projects with German engineers (generally supported through DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)) spanning research and teaching. This connection was initiated only three months prior to the Case Study interview and is already resulting in solid networks and partnerships. Dr Wickramasuriya's experience with the Germans is: '[They] wanted to connect and they were really willing to take it on ... without the funding'.

5.3.2 Family and gender-related challenges

One alumna felt that her familial responsibilities affected her ability to build and maintain networks. After starting a family and taking on its associated responsibilities, she felt that her social networks contracted. This contrasted with her strong networking skills she had developed while on scholarship. She explained the change as follows:

[Following my scholarship] whenever I go to any expos or anything I would be getting jobs quickly ... now I have closed up my circle so I have to polish up on those skills again.

Now that her children are older, this alumna is keen to broaden her personal and professional networks again. In discussing the possibility of engaging with an alumni association, she felt this would be beneficial to her.

Mr Banunusinghage reflected on his lack of involvement in developing professional networks and joining Australian alumni associations was due to heavy family responsibilities during his time on scholarship and in the following years on return in Sri Lanka:

Maybe because I was raising three children and it was only a single-person income. I was more [focused on raising the children] and educating those three children to get to the degree status at least, and then to postgraduate. So I think generally I used to be more involved [before the children] with the local institutions and my [local] university.

5.3.3 Impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War

For the two Sri Lankan Tamils in this Case Study, a return to Sri Lanka at the completion of their scholarships was not feasible. The Sri Lankan Civil War significantly impacted on their home town and region and once they left Sri Lanka for their scholarship they did not return. And the war had an impact on their ability to establish formal networks in the country. One alumna described her links as being more 'family based, not work based', which was the result of having never worked in Sri Lanka.

Even for those alumni who were not of Sri Lankan Tamil origin, the impact of 30 years of civil war was seen as a significant barrier to progress and development. Dr Perera summed up this period as being the reason he did not remain in Sri Lanka:

[It was] a troubled period Sri Lanka went through ... So in 1980 (around that period), there was quite difficult times for the security of individuals, there was a lot of terrorism-type activities happening and we decided to uproot ourselves and the children. Our parents encouraged us to leave. That's with sad feelings, but it gave opportunities for all of us to make a living in Australia.

5.3.4 English language skills as a barrier to networking

The importance of good language skills in helping to establish connections and networks was an issue highlighted by one alumna in particular. Dr Nalini felt that a lack of confidence in her oral language skills was an aspect which impacted her networking and making friendships at university, especially in the first few months of her scholarship. Dr Nalini had learnt English at school, but rarely had she used the language in conversation, in fact Dr Nalini's interview during the scholarship application process at the Australian High Commission in Colombo was the first time she had ever spoken English: 'I studied English as a second language up to year 10, but I had never talked in English in Jaffna.' Describing this predicament in her own words, Dr Nalini noted:

I had the problem when I arrived in Australia where I was too shy to talk in English as I was worried about making a lot of grammatical mistakes. So I tended to only socialise with the other two people who came from Sri Lanka on my scholarship.

Despite this, Dr Nalini's confidence improved and she developed informal networks with Indonesian students and an Australian student. She also undertook internships in an Australian engineering company as part of her degree, which highlights how much her confidence and competence in English improved during her scholarship.

5.4 The Australia Awards as a vehicle for economic and public diplomacy

Based on the alumni interviews in this Case Study, there were only limited examples of ongoing and sustainable networking and partnerships recorded. However, Australian High Commission personnel and Australia Awards South and West Asia staff were interested in emphasising that the Australia Awards and predecessor scholarship programs have helped to facilitate 'soft' diplomacy in Sri Lanka.

Ms de Alwis explained her experience during her time as such:

In terms of diplomatic access, we have seen some usefulness on gaining links within government here [in Sri Lanka] ... scholarships and aid were key things that gave even the High Commission the leverage. We were invited by the President every time there was a disaster. Involvement in helping depended on how much each country gives in aid. Australia is not the biggest in terms of dollars, but we were there mainly due to the scholarship programs. It was popular and well regarded.

Current DFAT staff in Sri Lanka indicated a similar experience:

... [the] Sri Lankan government, [are] very happy with the program. This program is important for government relationships as it is one of the main topics we discuss when we go to speak with our partner contacts in the government. The Australia Awards is the most important partner for them. The government ministries have their scheme for employees. If they get an Australia Award they are likely to get a promotion.

The operations manager of the Australia Awards in Sri Lanka, expressed how he sees this aspect as a critical role of the scholarships: 'My view is that [the scholarships] is one of the key parts of the foundation of diplomatic relationships for the Australian government and key partners in the region ... We know that partner governments view the program positively.'

6. Views about Australia and Australian expertise

Summary findings

- Alumni in the Sri Lanka Case Study hold 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.
- Many of the alumni involved in this Case Study have applied Australian expertise in their work. The use of lecture notes, books and journal papers collected in Australia for teaching Sri Lankan students in universities was a key example of this application in practice.
- Many also had fond memories of Australian culture and had adapted some ideas they saw while on scholarship to their lives on return.

6.1 Background

This chapter provides insight into how alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise. Although not a specific research question for the Case Study, detailed data were collected about this aspect of alumni experiences: it is one of the four long-term outcomes of the Global Strategy, namely that 'alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively'.

The Facility team determined that asking alumni directly about their views on Australia, Australians, and Australian expertise would not be useful and subject to acquiescence response bias. Accordingly, the interview instrument included questions such as 'Can you tell me about your time in Australia and experience as a scholarship recipient?' and '[During your career], Have you ever drawn upon Australian expertise in your work?' This was determined as a more appropriate way of obtaining a balance of views. The latter question was designed on the basis that *use* of Australian expertise in a professional sense is a good indicator of one's views about the quality and relevance of that expertise. This chapter describes the various sources for alumni's views about Australia, and how these views were revealed in professional contexts.

6.2 How alumni's views about Australia were formed

Alumni's views about Australia and Australian expertise come from both their academic experiences and their experiences of living in Australia. It is important to note that few of the alumni had any specific knowledge about or links with Australia prior to commencing their scholarship.

Alumni spoke fondly of their time on award in Australia. The reflections below cover the academic aspects of their experience, followed by reflections on other aspects of life that were gathered while studying in Australia.

6.2.1 Academic experiences

In terms of academic experiences, many of the alumni mentioned the difference in the way in which education was delivered in Australia compared with their experience in Sri Lanka. **Dr Nalini** highlighted the friendliness and relative informality of lecturers. She recounted an amusing anecdote that both sums up this informality and highlights the cultural difference experienced by the alumni:

The lecturers wore shorts and shirt and tie! We couldn't concentrate on the lecture because we were amused looking at them and thinking 'how can it be?!' In Sri Lanka people would never wear tie with shorts!

Many of the alumni appreciated this informal approach, and as discussed in Chapter 4, **Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya** adopted this approach as a doctoral supervisor. His former student, Dr Kumari Fernando is now following in these footsteps through her approach to teaching.

Mr Wijaya Rodrigo was particularly pleased with the educational opportunities he gained while on scholarship. As mentioned earlier, during his time, his lecturers at UNSW were able to provide the students access to key documents of the then-recent Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry, which provided the perfect opportunity for Mr W Rodrigo to see the theory being taught in practice: 'They analysed the areas where the disputes occur, and then they give the areas how to overcome that. So this was very beneficial to me when I came back to deliver these things.'

More than thirty years after leaving Australia, **Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage** continues to reflect on the academic experience he gained there: '[It's] the exposure that you get. Even yesterday I was going through [my notes] and I found "*sustainability*" and now I'm very interested [in this area].'

However, Mr Banunusinghage also saw some negatives in the education in Australia during the time he studied: 'I think the completion rate was very low at the time ... and the durations for PhDs were dragging for 5–6 years. This was a long time compared with the UK degrees which were taking only 3 years and the US, 4 years.' This longer period of time impacted Mr Banunusinghage's outcomes. He was unfortunately unable to finish his doctorate in the time that his employer had given him to study, and after five years had to return to Sri Lanka without the qualification he had hoped to achieve. Despite this, as noted above, his attitude to Australian expertise remains extremely positive, and he has followed the education system and believes there have been improvements since his study: 'Now I think the things have changed, Australian degrees, the duration and completion rates are high and are in line with the rest of the world.'

6.2.2 Experiences of living in Australia

Alumni also spoke about their experiences of 'life' in Australia during their award in a very positive light, even though the policy-context in Australia was not necessarily welcoming. For example, **Mr Tennyson Rodrigo** commenced study at UNSW in the second year of the Colombo Plan (1952), which was more than two decades before the

abolition of the White Australia Policy. Mr T Rodrigo continues to hold a 'fascination' for Australia built on the admiration of the people he met and studied with.

Ms Selvi Jayaganesh found the Australian experience important in providing a perspective and counter-point to the social norms and hierarchies that she was used to. Her experiences had been ones in which 'people were respected based on your titles, what you have, what you study and things like that. But after coming here [to Australia] that kind of mentality has gone from me. I can accept anyone as a person.' Ms Jayaganesh saw this in the engineering profession, but also in other aspects of life, for example in attitudes to people with disability: 'In Australia, if I am not talking or walking in a normal way, I won't be judged but back home that could be possible'.

Finally, in terms of experiences, Mr Banunusinghage identified a familiar cultural slogan in Australia that he has continued to practice and to pass on to his children:

I saw in Sydney, your slogan 'do the right thing', which I still remember! So then I tried to import this and do every day because I had seen it in Sydney, where people are cleaning their backyards and also their lawns, but here people don't do that. So back here where I used to live, I used to practice [this] and we keep our area very clean. I think these are things which are nothing to do with our theoretical studies, but things that are good practices that you learn and impart in good societies.

6.3 Application of Australian expertise

A number of examples of the application of Australian expertise were discussed in previous chapters. In this section, a range of such examples is provided in the context of providing evidence that Australian expertise is well regarded and continues to be used by alumni.

Mr Wickramasuriya offered a number of examples of the way he has applied the things he learned in Australia into his work as an engineering academic and with his links into government and industry. Already mentioned in this report are examples of his sourcing Hydro Tasmania to run risk management workshops for Sri Lankan engineers. Mr Wickramasuriya specifically made links through Engineers Australia to form this link because of his knowledge and respect for Australian expertise: 'I didn't try Germany or France because there is a natural affinity to Australia, and I knew that Australian institutions had brought out publications [in the area we wanted help with]. I still like Australia a lot; it's special to me, next to my own country.'

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mr Wickramasuriya would have liked to have even more opportunities to link with and apply this expertise during his career.

The three alumni (Dr Wickramasuriya, **Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage**, and Mr Banunusinghage) who worked in universities after their scholarships, alongside their students Dr Fernando and Dr Upuli Jayatunga who were interviewed during this Case Study, all mentioned the continued use of the notes that they took while in Australia or while being taught by alumni who had studied in Australia. These lecture notes have been influential in elevating Australian expertise in Sri Lankan universities. The example from Dr Fernando of Mr Wickramasuriya's lectures was noted earlier in this report. Mr Banunusinghage explained how he applied this learning:

I used the notes I had made from a biomedical lecturer at the School of Medical *Engineering* at UNSW to help with my teaching in this area. The notes that he used to

lecture to me, I then used to teach at Moratuwa, when we had one module on biomedical engineering way back about 15 years back. Now Moratuwa University started a biomedical engineering division in electronics engineering.

Mr Wickramasuriya, Mr Banunusinghage and Mr W Rodrigo also all mentioned that they continued to use the books and journal articles that they collected while in Australia on award.

Mr Banunusinghage's experience and respect for Australian expertise led him back to Sydney after completing his doctorate. He followed his supervisor and mentor and carried in his footsteps.

That connection I developed as a lecturer at the university continued on, he is still a close colleague of mine, and he is very close to my areas of research. He was a very close mentor of mine and has been a real hallmark figure for me.

Mr Banunusinghage's connection and affinity with Australia has led him to introduce dozens of other Sri Lankans to Australian expertise through facilitating scholarships at his university (detailed in Chapter 5).

7. Impact of Australia Awards in addressing equity issues

Summary findings

Targeted approaches to ensuring gender equality and ethnic ratios in Australia Awards selection processes have offered alumni opportunities to study overseas, which they would not otherwise have been able to do.

Barriers continue to exist for women, people with disability and Sri Lankan Tamils in being able to access awards and/or maximise the impact of the awards following their completion. Some of these challenges are summarised below.

For women:

- cultural barriers and expectations that they prioritise familial responsibilities as the primary caregivers
- career progression in engineering, given the male-dominated nature of the profession.

For people with disability:

- lack of infrastructure
- cultural attitudes
- issues with accessing mainstream education.

For ethnic groups:

• **ethnicity** has had a substantial impact on some of the alumni involved in this Case Study: specifically, as a result of the Sri Lankan Civil War, the Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae were not able to return home.

While some of these issues were changing (such as building regulations being updated), and although there was a strong emphasis on encouraging Australia Awards applications from people with disability, these barriers were seen to persist.

7.1 Background

The final research question, 'Are the benefits of receiving a scholarship experienced equally by all groups who have received them?', seeks to understand the impact of the Australia Awards on Australia's investment priorities specific to gender equality and female empowerment, and disability inclusiveness. The investment priorities for Sri Lanka are as stated under Aid Objective 3: Increase gender equality¹². However, the Australia Awards and its predecessor scholarship programs also focused on disability

¹² Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Aid Investment Plan: Sri Lanka Program, 2015–2019, at <u>http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/sri-lanka-aid-investment-plan-2015-19.pdf</u>, p.3.

inclusivity and ethnic minority inclusion. This Case Study explores two aspects in investigating the impact of the Australia Awards:

- the context within which the priority area operates
- the impact on alumni of receiving scholarships from the Australian Government.

The sample size of the Case Study cohort and the gendered nature of the field of engineering place limitations on fully understanding the impact of the Australia Awards on gender equality and disability inclusiveness.

As there were only two alumnae, both of whom did not return to Sri Lanka, and there were no alumni with disability included in the study, strong conclusions cannot be reached. However, each Case Study alumni credited the Australian scholarships with having a **significant impact** on their life and career.

This chapter discusses the impact that the scholarships had on the Case Study alumni and then explores the issues of gender, disability and ethnicity identified in this research.

7.2 Barriers to access

7.2.1 Impact on alumni

Without scholarships, most of the alumni involved in this Case Study would never have had an opportunity to study overseas. One alumnus, **Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage** (Dr Perera) shared that 'if not for the scholarship, I would not have any chance of getting an overseas education. I had no wealth and I came with nothing.' **Dr Nalini** was an alumna who mentioned the impact the scholarships had on herself and her husband (who was also a recipient). Dr Nalini's husband applied for a scholarship as he was the main provider for his family after the passing of his father at age fifteen. As a result of the scholarship he 'could easily secure a job to help the rest of the family'. A third, **Ms Selvi Jayaganesh** highlighted that the scholarship gave her 'the opportunity to be exposed to a new country. I see the greatest outcome now being how it helped my confidence. With my type of personality, this country opened me up to many good things'.

Australian High Commission staff in Sri Lanka, who work on the Australia Awards, highlighted that an important strength of the Australia Awards is its focus on accessibility. Special measures have been used to target people with disability and people from rural regions. Additional support is also provided through pre-course English provisions and adjustments to selection criteria are also made to enable people with disability to go to Australia to undertake further study. In addition, alumni in this Case Study referenced the ability for them to bring their family to Australia for the duration of their course, facilitated by visas that provided access to local schools for their children as a positive aspect of the scholarship. The DFAT Sri Lanka team observed that the focus on inclusiveness in the Australia Awards has resulted in an increase in applications from outside of Colombo.

7.3 Gender and disadvantage in Sri Lanka

7.3.1 Context

As detailed by one alum:

Sri Lanka has a more male dominated society. Even me who grew up in Sri Lanka until I was twenty years of age, I still feel more connected with the views of Sri Lankan society. For example, in Sri Lanka divorce is considered a shame. The family members make decisions or do anything only with the approval of their father/husband. Please note, that it is approval and not permission. But here in Australia, the wife and adult children are more independent in making decisions or their choices. My family is a mixture of both cultures. In Sri Lanka, the women still follow the old tradition.

Within the field of education, female attendance at university was frequently referenced during interviews as evidence of gender equality in Sri Lanka. In particular, progress in gender equality was identified by many alumni as the increase in enrolments – from the exceptional few females in their courses to today where females are more frequently represented. A participation rate of around 35 to 40 per cent of females in engineering was noted by Dr Jagath Peiris, Chief Executive Officer of the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka.

However, as articulated by DFAT staff in Sri Lanka:

Women are doing much better than men [academically] but it's not translating to equal labour force participation. I think a master's degree now can be a further opportunity to help get women in [to more senior positions].

Based on interviews undertaken for this Case Study, it is apparent that strong cultural barriers remain for women who choose to engage in paid work. These factors appear to be exacerbated because of this Case Study's focus on engineering – a highly male-dominated profession. One alumnus shared the observation that:

Generally, the girls used to learn more theoretically, but of course when it comes to the hands-on, I think then the boys take over [and the females step aside]."

In other words – women in engineering have found it hard to convert their success in the classroom into their ability to progress in their careers as engineers, especially in the context of working on-site.

Case Study interviews were important in providing context to the research and highlighted that the level of impact the Australia Awards is likely to have on gender equality and the empowerment of women is still very strongly influenced by cultural norms regarding the role of women in society and in the family. While the Australia Awards can contribute to change, some perspective is needed when considering their overall capacity to influence enduring social norms and the nation as a whole.

It was observed during the Case Study that gender equality, or at least neutrality, did permeate the views of the alumni and other Case Study participants, particularly those who taught at universities. During discussions, the gender of a student or colleague was never highlighted or distinguished when referring to their achievements. This was noted with interest, as emphasising a woman's achievement is common in Australia; and is done with an emphasis on specifically mentioning or highlighting gender empowerment.

7.3.2 Promoting equality for women

In promoting gender equality in scholarships, DFAT staff in Sri Lanka have ensured a fifty-fifty quota for scholarships, with male and female applications assessed separately. However, our understanding of the positive impacts for women offered by the

scholarships is restricted by the sample size in this Case Study. Very few of the alumni in the target group for this Case Study – engineering graduates from more than twenty years ago – were women. In addition, the two alumnae who participated in this Case Study were also from the Sri Lankan Tamil minority and did not return to Sri Lanka on the completion of their studies due to the impact of the Sri Lankan Civil War. As such, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions regarding the impact of the scholarships on alumni who returned to Sri Lanka.

However, some examples were noted during the interviews. For example, Ms Jayaganesh described a transformative experience in breaking from the mould and the expectations of her community in going alone to Australia as an unmarried woman:

Tamil people are very judgemental. So when I left Sri Lanka they were thinking 'oh she's going alone, how is she going to manage', no other insight or anything. So others managed to infuse some fears into my parents. I think if I had stayed in Sri Lanka, I would have to be a little bit more submissive than how I am now.

7.3.3 Challenges for women

Family responsibilities

The expectation placed on women as the primary caregivers in their homes places a duality of burden. A female participant stated that this burden of responsibility is cultural, 'once [women] are raising a family they take a step back [from their career], it's sort of the expectation'.

Despite this, neither of the alumnae in this Case Study reported any gendered barriers they personally had to overcome in order to undertake the scholarship. However, a female colleague of an alumnus and former student discussed how she had been encouraged to undertake a doctorate in a different country. Despite this encouragement, she felt that such an opportunity was not possible for her due to family commitments, looking after her children as well as her mother and mother-in-law who were both living with her. She explained this as being the custom within Asian countries. This gave some important context – while it is reported by DFAT that attracting female applicants is not an issue for the Australia Awards – there are some cultural barriers that women with familial responsibilities are more likely to consider before undertaking opportunities to study abroad that their other female and male peers may not.

Career progression

Ms Jayaganesh believes that gender has some impact on career progression generally. However, personally, she did not feel affected by this, sharing that 'I've been lucky, I don't think I have had discrimination anywhere'. Neither Ms Jayaganesh nor Dr Nalini the other alumna returned to Sri Lanka after award; both commenced their careers in Singapore. Ms Jayaganesh observed that 'maybe pay-wise I might be getting less than my male peers. But I don't know, I've never compared, I just go on'. Dr Nalini found that gender was a barrier in applying for jobs in Singapore and noted that:

The first job I found in Singapore provided me with the view that gender does matter. They seemed to prefer males more than females. But in my career, since securing that job, I have never felt discriminated against, be it salary or position wise.

The engineering workforce

It is important to re-emphasise that the engineering workforce globally is heavily male dominated and gender imbalance in the engineering and technology sectors is a worldwide phenomenon. However, for the alumnae in this Case Study, it appears that receiving a scholarship as a female engineer may have improved their chances of achieving equality in the workplace.

Further, on gender equality in the workplace and more specifically in Sri Lanka, **Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage** stated that he believed discrimination existed:

Because in Sri Lanka, I think the problem for the ladies is the children so then they leave and some companies don't like it. They don't disclose it, but generally that aspect is there ... But in engineering generally, they fit into certain disciplines well.

In some of the interviews undertaken for this Case Study, the perspectives provided in terms of this industry are likely to be applicable anywhere in the world, not just in Sri Lanka. Some of the female participants in the interviews described difficulties in asserting authority and leadership in their roles as engineers in industry. A female colleague of one alumnus described the difficulty in undertaking a leadership role soon after graduating, describing that:

When we passed out [graduated] at that time also, lead female engineers were very few so working on-site was very difficult, [it involved] giving orders to labourers to do the work and to do it correctly was a little difficult [as a woman]. We sometimes can't give orders, so it's a little difficult.

Another female colleague shared a similar perspective, stating that:

My experience as a woman in engineering, I love the academic job. One issue is difficulty in industry. Design [work] is okay, sitting in front of a computer, or papers, etc. When you go on site it is really hard. Paper is fine, you have all the PR skills, all the soft skills to be there, but they are not successful outside [onsite]...In academia as a women I don't feel any barriers.

7.4 Disability in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka Case Study did not have any participants, alumni or otherwise, who identified as having disability. However, the insights from those interviewed regarding disability inclusiveness in Sri Lanka generally and the impact of the Australia Awards provided a broad context for exploring disability inclusiveness.

Disability inclusiveness in Sri Lanka is an area that a number of Case Study participants believed as having undergone some recent changes, but which still requires improvement. Relating to accessibility, **Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya** perceived that there was greater sensitivity and awareness towards disability inclusiveness. In addition, the CEO of the Institution of Engineers pointed to a 2015 government initiative that requires disability access requirements in every newly constructed building.

However, one alumnus observed that the ways in which for people with disability can access support remain weak in Sri Lanka. In addition to policies and legislation impacting disability in Sri Lanka, another alumnus highlighted mindset as a key issue, 'society will judge you and apply certain thinking on you.' Further, cultural factors hold

implications for the responsibility and visibility of people with disability, **Mr Wijaya Rodrigo** shared that:

... it's social and cultural. If I am disabled, for example, it's not difficult for me to find somebody to look after me and look after my things ... our family ties are very strong ... I will not be alone, at all, unless for very few, [such as] very, very old or poor people. Mostly, even the villages are looking after them.

Similarly, in understanding disability in Sri Lanka, Dr Upuli Jayatunga stated that in comparison to Australia, there are no equal opportunities for people with disability. She suggested that the outcomes for people with disability are highly dependent on their families' financial support. Without this 'children are neglected, they don't have the career opportunities'.

Social stigma associated with disability appears to be a central factor in addressing disability inclusiveness, with one alumnus providing a contextual example:

... if I am disabled, if I got to some hospital or a government organisation to take my pension or something like that, there is someone who can help me or someone to go on behalf of me. I was in England about two years after my retirement, so I saw that some people have motorised, fully mechanised vehicles for them to go to a marketplace, take the things and that. If you go to a supermarket here you will never see a disabled person. It's the culture.

Another participant observed this lack of visibility in the public sphere as the result of culture.

It's seen as an issue and families don't bring disabled people out into public. There is a stigma attached if you've got someone in the family with a disability, so they're all hidden away.

Within this context, the Australia Awards in Sri Lanka has made changes to reduce the barriers that would prevent people with disability from submitting applications to Australia Awards. For people with disability and for those who work in the disability sector, the International English Language Test System (IELTS) score has been lowered to support participation and applications for the Australia Awards. In that past two years, six such applicants in Sri Lanka were selected for Australia Awards scholarships. Australia Awards South and West Asia also highlighted that participation is strengthened by the additional in-Australia support provided, which includes the cost of a medical carer and other related costs while on award in Australia.

7.4.1 Positive impacts for disability inclusiveness

There is evidence that disability inclusion within the tertiary education system in Sri Lanka has progressed. Dr Jayatunga shared her observations at the University of Moratuwa where there are 'a few students with hearing disabilities'. Dr Kumari Fernando, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the General Sir Kotelawala Defence University highlighted the support programs provided and stated that 'We help our students, there are a few physical disabilities, but some mental due to stress problems.'

The Australia Awards South and West Asia has recently developed an innovative program to build advocacy and skills for inclusive education. A regional alumni workshop on inclusive education was run in 2016, attracting 325 applications from across the region for 42 positions to attend. Inclusive education was broadly defined as not only disability but also social and geographic inclusive education. The theme of

inclusive education was selected for its alignment with the identified key priorities of the Australian Government education strategy and development strategy. The workshop was held in Kathmandu, Nepal and facilitated by Professor Suzanne Carrington, editor of the *International Journal for Inclusive Education*. The objectives of the workshop developed were:

- 1 to offer professional development
- 2 to increase the participants' understanding of policies and practices in inclusive education in the region
- 3 to create professional linkages among the alumni at a regional level
- 4 to develop a community of practice among inclusive education practitioners.

After the workshop, Professor Carrington invited the participating alumni to contribute to a special issue of the *International Journal for Inclusive Education* and present the work they do on inclusive education in their own countries.

7.4.2 Challenges for people with disability

With scholarships only recently provided to people with disability in Sri Lanka, this Case Study was not able to provide primary evidence of the challenges faced by alumni. However, Case Study participants identified some barriers to accessing the educational opportunities offered by the Australia Awards. Ms Pubudu Gnanissara, DFAT Manager for the Australia Awards Sri Lanka and the Maldives, noted a lack of mainstreaming in the education system for students with disability, with a subsequent impact for such people to be in a position to apply for the Australia Awards. Ms Chandrika de Alwis also shared this perception stating that:

There are very few opportunities for disabled people to study further. It's only through the determination of some individuals that they go as far as they go ... they don't have the opportunities as in other countries ... for them it's a bottleneck actually.

There was an additional challenge in offering scholarships to applicants with disability because of visa and immigration policies of the Australian Government. As a result of policies in force, an Australia Awards recipient was unable to go to Australia because they did not meet the Australian immigration medical requirements due to the implications of their disability.

Discrimination that results from culture and mindset is a typical challenge faced by people with disability, including people in Sri Lanka. While some alumni shared that there was no discrimination against people with disability, including in the workplace, one alumni mentioned a recent story they had seen in the news about a girl with disability whose mother carried her up the stairs to her classroom every day to ensure that she could attend and explained that:"

... the Principal changed everything and brought the classroom down to the ground floor. So that is the culture, they won't make a passage for her to go up because there is no one else, only her problem. So then it is not a common issue [that affects everyone].

Mr Tennyson Rodrigo had a similar perspective about majority needs versus individual requirements:

... I think there is a barrier [for people with disability] and that may be partly due to the fairly high unemployment rates in the country in certain areas, and partly due to the

perception that if somebody is physically handicapped he or she might not be able to provide or contribute to the best possible extent that a normal person might be able to. This is my guess, and you don't see very many people like that employed. I haven't seen very many people, it is not common to see somebody [who uses] a wheelchair or in a government office or even private sector. There is competition for jobs.

7.5 Ethnicity in Sri Lanka

This Case Study includes two participants who are from the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic minority group and who are also from the conflict areas during the time of the Sri Lankan Civil War of 1983–2009. The two alumnae, Dr Nalini and Ms Jayaganesh travelled to Australia at the time of the Civil War to undertake their scholarships. Dr Nalini stated that at the time she made her application, there was no specific ethic ratio applied in the application selection process, although an ethnic ratio was eventually introduced by the Australian Government. In addition, there was no requirement that scholarship alumni were to return to Sri Lanka after award (although they did need to leave Australia).

For these Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae, the prospect of leaving Sri Lanka during the Civil War was appealing. Their parents encouraged them to study abroad for both their personal safety and the greater opportunities available to Sri Lankan Tamil people outside of Sri Lanka. Fear for personal security was felt by Ms Jayaganesh, whose father was 'impacted' by the 1983 strikes, 'he was shot but luckily escaped. So he really wanted to explore other options, he said it was probably better [for me] to go outside'.

Ethnic inclusion is an area with which DFAT staff in Sri Lanka have been cognisant of, Ms de Alwis stated that:

... ethnicity is a key issue. For those from Colombo it's not an issue but when you get out into the rural and remote areas there are biases based on ethnicity. It's less developed and less resourced.

The two alumnae in this Case Study also experienced this bias in the majority Singhalese areas, which included Colombo at the time.

7.5.1 Positive impacts for ethnic minorities

The introduction of ethnic ratios in the allocation of Australia Awards scholarships was seen as very important for the two Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae, with Ms Jayaganesh stating that:

Ethnic ratios, women ratios, offered a good opportunity. Otherwise, we would not have got the chance, I would say ... we Tamils were sidelined all the time, so having specific opportunities made by ratios was good.

Australian government scholarships have applied ethnic quotas for many years, and offer Sri Lankan Tamils much-desired opportunities to study overseas.

7.5.2 Challenges for ethnic minorities

There have been some challenges that have undermined the impact of the Australia Awards for Tamil Sri Lankans. As discussed in other chapters of this report, the option of the alumni returning to Sri Lanka was not realistic both during and following the conclusion of the civil conflict. The Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae felt that returning to work in Colombo was not a good option, as there were many restrictions placed on the Sri Lankan Tamil people. Further, there was perceived ethnic discrimination in the workplace in Colombo. One alumni referenced the example of a Sri Lankan Tamil friend who went back to Colombo and faced difficulties in finding employment stating that:

... in engineering or the IT side of jobs they are mostly in Singhalese areas ... even if you are so good, Tamils will be sidelined. So other countries will give more opportunities than in Sri Lanka.

For Dr Nalini, the necessity for global mobility has had a negative impact on her career progression:

... because I have moved different countries, until recently I have only worked in a single company for a maximum of two- to two-and-a-half years, my current role has been for four years, which is the longest I have worked in one place. This has meant that my career progression has been a bit slow. Each time we have moved, I have to start my work at a bit lower level. So, I would have liked to stay in one country and I think if I had done so I could have come to a better position in my career than where I am now.

7.6 Further impact of the Australia Awards in the Sri Lankan context

7.6.1 Geography

Geography has affected the impact of the Australia Awards on the investment priorities of gender, disability, and ethnicity. The most crucial aspect being, as shared by Ms de Alwis that 'a person from a city has more access to education, but the rural areas do not have those opportunities'. Ensuring the human resource development benefits are shared equally within a partner-country is pertinent for ensuring holistic development.

Geographical location had a physical impact on alumni who lived outside of Colombo at the time when they were applying for the Australia Awards. For example, Dr Nalini described the lengths she had to go to in order to apply for the scholarship. She was required to go to Colombo to obtain and then lodge the application form. At that time, Colombo was a twelve-hour coach ride overnight from her home:

I would go to line up at the Australian High Commission – at 5.00 am I was behind about 1000 people ... a very big queue along road. Then the High Commission would open at 9.00 am, and they would say 'the forms haven't come in yet'! So you would go and come back again the next day. It took me five or six days, but I finally got application form and applied for the scholarship ... and then we took the night coach and went home.

However, Dr Nalini's application story did not finish at this point. When she arrived back home, there was a message to say she had been chosen for an interview. She promptly 'turned straight around and went back on the night bus for the interview. Even though the distance was not much, the travel time was 12 hours – so it was a big trip.'

7.6.2 Educational opportunities and English languages skills

Since 1942, Sri Lanka has had a policy of free public schooling with compulsory primary and lower secondary (Grades 6–9) school attendance¹³, resulting in a high

¹³ 'Sri Lanka', Education Policy and Data Center, accessed at <u>http://www.epdc.org/country/srilanka</u>, 19 April 2017.

adult literacy rate of 93 per cent.¹⁴ However, while there is universal free education, not all providers are of an equal standard; regional and rural areas lag behind urban areas. Locally provided educational facilities and resources appear to be a determining factor for the opportunities available to students in Sri Lanka. For example, Mr W Rodrigo had a desire to undertake the science stream for his O-Level exams; however, his village school did not provide this. Fortunately, he was successful in gaining a science scholarship to Central College, which was away from his home, so that he could undertake the education he wanted.

People from regional and rural areas are likely to have additional barriers to overcome or lack opportunities to undertake quality education with choices in subject availability. These factors may be influential in understanding the biases that people from these areas face in seeking information about their eligibility for scholarship programs such as the Australia Awards, and which are beyond the influence of DFAT Sri Lanka staff to address when encouraging inclusivity.

In addition, English language skills were identified by a number of the alumni as being an obstacle to overcome, which may also affect the impact that the Australia Awards can have on its key investment priorities. Issues with attaining the required skills level include the mode of instruction in schools and the availability to use and develop English language skills outside of the classroom. One alumna stated that at the time she had attended school, English was taught as the primary medium only in private schools. As noted earlier, the first time Dr Nalini ever used English in conversation was during the interview for her scholarship.

DFAT staff in Sri Lanka recognise that English language can be a barrier to accessing the Australia Awards and note that it can preclude some people from applying. To reduce this barrier, the English requirements have been lowered and extra support for language skills development is provided for people who are working or who are from certain parts of Sri Lanka. When such applicants are successful, they are also provided with additional language courses in Australia prior to the start of their study.

An additional barrier identified by the DFAT staff in Sri Lanka is the cost of undertaking the IELTS Test. A pilot program was initiated to address this that included English support and payment to cover the cost of the IELTS test. However, the pilot was deemed unsuccessful as only two of the fourteen participants passed.

¹⁴ Sri Lanka, Adult Literacy rate, population 15+ years, both sexes (%), The World Bank, accessed at <u>http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=LK</u>. 19 April 2017.

8. Conclusion

This Facility Case Study focused on alumni from the engineering sector in Sri Lanka who completed their scholarship at least 20 years ago. A total of seven alumni participated (5 men and 2 women), with four currently located in Sri Lanka, while the other 3 now live in Australia. Further evidence was gathered through interviews with key stakeholders. This Case Study has identified **evidence of development impact by alumni that spanned the engineering industry.** Alumni mentioned positive changes to policy and practice, and contributions to major infrastructure projects. Alumni have also made contributions to capacity development through teaching at tertiary institutions. The key factor enabling these contributions was that the scholarships for these alumni were awarded at a point in time where well qualified engineers were in high demand in Sri Lanka. This meant that alumni were highly valuable following their scholarship and able to contribute throughout their careers to achieving development goals due to the demand for their skills and knowledge. This example demonstrates the value of ensuring scholarships are well targeted to **fields of study that complement partner-country development priorities**.

However, for some alumni included in this Case Study, their potential impact could have been even greater, but **the Sri Lankan Civil War** (which spanned a substantial period of the careers of these alumni) **limited the ability of alumni to make further contributions**. The effect of civil war most significantly affected the two Sri Lankan Tamil alumnae in this Case Study as they were unable to return to Sri Lanka to live and work.

Of the alumni included in this research, Mr Tennyson Rodrigo who was amongst the first cohort of Colombo Plan scholarship recipients in 1952, stands out as an alumnus who has transferred skills and knowledge gained on award across sectors. Mr T Rodrigo gained a successful engineering career on return from scholarships, including leading the development of a fertiliser plant, and then moved into the emerging venture capital sector identifying new capital opportunities for Sri Lanka. Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage (Dr Perera) and Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya have both made significant contributions at their respective universities as program coordinators and lecturers, and have been strong advocates for developing links between Australian and Sri Lankan universities. In policy, Mr Wijaya Rodrigo has made significant contributions in professionalising the construction industry through policy and process development, as well as guiding university infrastructure development to meet growing student needs. Other alumni such as Dr Nalini, Ms Selvi Javaganesh, and Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage have made positive contributions to engineering practice. Overall, findings from the Sri Lanka Case Study suggest that Australia Awards Outcome 1 – that alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development - was achieved.

In developing and maintaining links with Australia, alumni in this Case Study shared a desire to remain connected but generally did not have strong ongoing

links or networks. Engagement typically took the form of Australian institution alumni association's newsletters and emails, and friendships built with the Sri Lankan community in Australia and with peers and lecturers. However, such connections were informal and typically lapsed over time. Alumni indicated that a lack of funding for developing links – especially within the higher education sector – was a reason for the limited ongoing partnerships. The Australia Awards Outcomes 2 and 3 are concerned with alumni contribution to cooperation and effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries. This Case Study suggests that while there is a lack of strong examples in this area, there is continuing effort and interest on the part of alumni to strengthen this in coming years. The recent development of the Sri Lankan Association of Australia Awards Alumni could play an important role in facilitating this.

Alumni in this Case Study hold very positive views about Australia that were formed as a result of their experiences while on award in Australia, and is further evidenced by their application of Australian theories, practices, and learning in their workplace and community. This indicates strong impact regarding Australia Awards Outcome 4 – that alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively.

This Case Study provided profound examples of the impact of the Australia Awards by targeting those who would not have studied overseas or progressed in their careers to the extent that they did without a scholarship. However, barriers to access the Australia Awards and/or maximise the impact of the award following complete continue to exist for women, and Sri Lankan Tamils. No alumni reported disability in this Case Study, however, participants were able to provide some insight into some of the general barriers to employment and education faced by people with disability. This reflected the broader barriers which affect accessing the Australia Awards for people with disability in Sri Lanka. In addition, access to English language in the classroom is far less available in rural areas, representing the ruralurban divide which exists in Sri Lanka and presents a barrier to accessing the Australia Awards and limits the impact it is able to have on rural populations.

9. Alumni profiles

Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage

What I am satisfied most by are two aspects. One thing is to see the students to whom I lectured or taught when they become professionally more qualified than us ... Then as a father; I think compared to my father's level of education I achieved more than what he could achieve. Maybe that was his ambition, I don't know. So I also want to see my children gaining a high level of education, I think which they did, and I managed to educate them, and then be good citizens. Not citizens of the country, but a citizen of the world.



| Scholarship | Colombo Plan | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1982–1986 | |
| Degree | Doctorate (non-completion) | |
| University | University of New South Wales | |
| Field | Electronic Engineering | |
| Current position | Founder and Director of Sigma Delta Technologies | |
| Brief biography | Mr Banunusinghage currently runs his own company, which provides a wide range of high-tech scientific and medical instrumentation for Sri Lanka as well as pursuing developments and distribution of solar energy technology. | |
| | He grew up in a village south of Colombo with his mother, who cared for him and his four brothers, and his father who was a school teacher. Mr Banunusinghage was one of two children in the family who went to university. | |
| | Prior to receiving a Colombo Plan scholarship, Mr Banunusinghage worked as a lecturer at the University of Moratuwa. He went to the University of New South Wales to pursue a doctorate in electronic engineering. Unfortunately, he was not able to complete his qualification and had to return to Sri Lanka to work after being on scholarship for four years. Nonetheless, Mr Banunusinghage continued to work for the University of Moratuwa on his return, eventually leading the Engineering Design Centre at the university before establishing his own business. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Colombo, Sri Lanka | |

ocation at time of field research: Colombo, Sri Lanka Date of interview: 6 December 2016

Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage

I think [what I am most proud of] is being able to progress through the various levels as an academic. These things have got various difficulties but being able to achieve what I have achieved so far is something that I am very proud of.

In my research area, being able to do the research and [become] established in that area, and also to function as the director for a number of years for the research centre, which is nationally regarded, is a great thing ... So I am really proud I have been able to achieve all these things and been of benefit to the wider community. I am more pleased about what I have been able to provide.



| Scholarship | Colombo Plan | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1977–1982 | |
| Degree | Master of Engineering, Doctor of Engineering | |
| University | University of New South Wales and University of Wollongong | |
| Field | Electrical Engineering | |
| Current position | Professor, School of Electrical, Computer and Telecommunications Engineering, University of Wollongong | |
| | Technical Director, Australian Power Quality and Reliability Centre | |
| Brief biography | Dr Perera is a Professor at the University of Wollongong, where he is a director of the Australian Power Quality and Reliability Centre. | |
| | He was born and raised in Kandy, where his father was an academic at a local university. He completed his schooling in Kandy before moving for his undergraduate studies at the University of Moratuwa. After his degree, he took up a position as instructor and lecturer at the university. | |
| | In the late 1970s, He was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship for a Masters in Engineering at the University of New South Wales. After two years, he was able to extend the scholarship to undertake his doctorate, following his supervisors to the University of Wollongong. | |
| | On completion of his doctorate, he returned to the University of Moratuwa and gained a position four years later as an academic back in Wollongong. Since taking this position in 1986, Dr Perera has been integral in supervising dozens of Sri Lankan students on scholarship in Australia. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Wollongong, Australia | |

Location at time of field research: Wollongong, Australia Date of interview: 6 February 2017

Ms Selvi Jayaganesh (nee Nallathamby)

The thing I am most proud of I am the oldest cousin and the one everyone looks up to. They follow because I did lots of hard work when I was younger, so they followed the same way and now they are in good position. They still look up to me for that. They look to me for general life guidance. That makes me very happy.



| Scholarship | Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) | |
|---|---|--|
| Years | 1993–1996 | |
| Degree | Bachelor of Engineering | |
| University | University of Melbourne | |
| Field | Engineering | |
| Current position | Employed in Australia – Data Design | |
| Brief biography | Ms Jayaganesh is of Sri Lankan Tamil background and grew up in a village near Jaffna. Her family was displaced by the Sri Lankan Civil War, and when the opportunity to apply for a scholarship to study in Australia arose, she was encouraged to pursue it as a means of broadening her prospects. | |
| Ms Jayaganesh gained a scholarship following her high schooling a studied at the University of Melbourne, completing her bachelor deg the mid-1990s. Following graduation, she left Australia, and unable return to Jaffna, was granted a visa by the Singapore Economic Development Board where she remained working in information tech engineering for eight years. | | |
| | In the early 2000s, Ms Jayaganesh returned to live in Australia with her husband and two children. She lives in Sydney and works in as a data design specialist with a major Australian bank. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Sydney, Australia Date of interview: 16 February 2017 | |

Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya

In a nutshell, it is not just one thing [that I am most proud of]; from undergraduate, post-graduate, and to industry; and in terms of staff-student relations. Also I have maintained relations with my Australian friends which brings me some happiness.

What I have done for the university at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and collaboration with industry [that is what I am most proud of].



| Scholarship | Colombo Plan | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1977–1981 | |
| Degree | Doctor of Engineering | |
| University | University of New South Wales | |
| Field | Hydrology | |
| Current position | Retired Associate Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka | |
| Brief biography | In December 2016, Dr Wickramasuriya retired after 40 years of academic service to the University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka. He continues to make contributions to engineering training in Sri Lanka through a number of honorary and part-time appointments. | |
| | Dr Wickramasuriya grew up in Colombo and undertook his undergraduate engineering degree in the mid-1970s at the University of Moratuwa, where he then became a lecturer on graduation. He obtained a Colombo Plan scholarship through the university in 1977 and undertook his doctorate at the University of New South Wales. | |
| | On return to Sri Lanka, Dr Wickramasuriya took up an academic appointment at Moratuwa and established the first engineering masters programs in the country as well as designing and developing the university's hydrology laboratory, still active today. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Colombo, Sri Lanka Date of interview: 5 December 2016 | |

Mr Tennyson Rodrigo



I think my biggest achievement is the eventual completion of the massive nitrogen fertiliser factory ... Eventually after a lot of setbacks, years of disappointment, I stuck [at it], and eventually, I did finish the project ... the factory is still running, it's very, very, old now. So I think that to me, irrespective of the status now, it was one of the biggest challenges.



| Scholarship | Colombo Plan | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1952–1955 | |
| Degree | Bachelor of Engineering | |
| University | University of New South Wales | |
| Field | Chemical Engineering | |
| Current position | Retired Chemical Engineer, former Managing Director and Chief Executive of Capital Development and Investment Company PLC | |
| Brief biography | Mr T Rodrigo lives in the centre of Colombo and has enjoyed retirement for the past 15 years. | |
| | He grew up in a village about 70 kilometres from Colombo and gained a bachelor degree in science from the University of Ceylon. He was working as a teacher when he applied for a Colombo Plan scholarship and was awarded a place at the University of New South Wales in only the second year of the Colombo Plan. | |
| | Mr T Rodrigo studied chemical engineering and on his return to Colombo worked on a range of significant infrastructure projects for the Sri Lankan government. He eventually moved to the private sector, becoming the 'father of venture capital' in Sri Lanka. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Colombo, Sri Lanka Date of interview: 30 November 2016 | |

Date of interview: 30 November 2016 Photo credit ('young Tennyson'): Sydney Morning Herald, article 23 Nov, 2012

Mr Wijaya (U. W.) Rodrigo

I got the courage because of the scholarship. I'm not boasting because I've got nothing to boast [laughs]. So this is the time that I achieved the most. And also the most important thing is, even when you say academics it is all the fields, not only in engineering. So now of course after long years, they have retired and gone, but after a few more years whenever I go to any place I can find somebody. They recognise me as a hard working honest engineer, not as a drinking man, or something like that. So that, I am very proud of that, very proud of that.



| Scholarship | Colombo Plan | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1991–1992 | |
| Degree | Masters of Engineering | |
| University | University of New South Wales | |
| Field | Structural Engineering | |
| Current position | Consultant Engineer | |
| Brief biography | Mr W Rodrigo is a semi-retired engineering consultant, directing structural engineering projects in Sri Lanka. | |
| | The eldest of eight children, Mr W Rodrigo began schooling in his village, before gaining a science scholarship to study at a boarding school, where he learnt English. Graduating from Peradeniya University in 1974, Mr W Rodrigo embarked on a career in the Buildings Department in the Sri Lankan public service. | |
| | In the early 1990s, an opportunity to take up a Colombo Plan scholarship arose, and Mr W Rodrigo identified a course at the University of New South Wales that would equip him with contract law and project management skills in engineering. | |
| | On return to Sri Lanka, Mr W Rodrigo led a number of large construction projects for Sri Lanka, as well as implementing new processes, technologies and management approaches to professionalise the industry. He retired from the public service having reached the 'topmost post'. | |
| | Location at time of field research: Colombo, Sri Lanka | |

Date of interview: 7 December 2016

Dr Nalini*

I am happy that I was able to complete my PhD ... I had a few crises and things but overcame that to complete.

| Scholarship | Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, AIDAB | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Years | 1990–1994 | |
| Degree | Masters of Engineering | |
| University | University of Sydney | |
| Field | Engineering | |
| Current position | Employed in Australia | |
| Brief biography | Dr Nalini grew up near Jaffna in Sri Lanka and come to Australia on an Equity and Merit Scholarship and studied for a Bachelor of Engineering at the University of Sydney. | |
| | After receiving her degree, Dr Nalini was unable to return to Sri Lanka due to the impact that the Civil War had on her homeland and her Sri Lankan Tamil family. | |
| | She lived and worked in Singapore and the United Kingdom, before returning to live in Australia with her husband and children. On return to Australia, she gained a doctorate from the University of Sydney in the mid- 2000s. Dr Nalini currently lives and works in Sydney. | |
| | *Dr Nalini requested an alias be used for reporting on this Case Study. Location at time of field research: Sydney, Australia Date of interview: 6 February 2017 | |
| | | |

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Annex 1: 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 Facility, 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 partnercountry development goals¹⁵
 - 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 an Australia Award or scholarship are experienced equally by all recipients.

¹⁵ 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 (see page 2). 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.

a receiving an Australia Award or scholarship positively addresses, rather than reinforces, imbalances that are associated with gender and disability.

Annex 2: Key participant questions

Alumni

[Validation question]

We'd like to start with learning a bit about you. We understand you are a scholarship alumni and you studied [in x year/s, at x university, in x field], is that right? Can you give us some background about your study and then your subsequent career pathway from then?

- 1 Can you please let me know why you applied? What was your motivation?
 - a Were there any difficulties or barriers to overcome in accepting the Australia Award/scholarship? On reflection, would you have made the same decisions? (G)
- 2 Can you tell me about your time in Australia and experience as a scholarship recipient?

[Ask a. and b. after interviewee has had an opportunity to answer the main question]

- a Did you make friends and professional networks?
- b Thinking about the friendships and networks that you might have developed on award, were there any that were long lasting, resulting in working together or connecting other people?
- 3 After you returned, what was your job and were you able to apply the skills and knowledge gained during your time on award?
 - a What were some of the barriers to applying these skills and knowledge when you returned home?
 - b What do you think is needed to assist alumni to use their skills and knowledge when they return home?
- 4 Based on your personal and/or professional experiences, what do you believe are the greatest benefits of the Australia Awards/scholarships initiative?
- 5 [During your career], Have you ever drawn upon Australian expertise in your work? Can you give an example of this, such as Australian-developed practices, ways of working, processes, theory/theorists, consultants, journals, models, equipment etc.?
- 6 Are you currently or have been a member of an alumni association, can you please describe for us how this is/was relevant for you?
 - a What more could be done?
 - b If not why not?
- 7 Can you describe an achievement that you are most proud of, in your work or community?

- a Is there any relationship between this achievement and receiving an Australia Award?
- 8 Were your beliefs or perspectives of the world changed or challenged in any way while on award? (G and I)
- 9 Compared with the men/women who have received an Australia Award from [country X], how has your career progressed since returning home? (G)
 - a Do you think gender impacts career progress?
 - b Do you think disability impacts career progress?
- 10 Compared to peers similar to you but did not receive an opportunity to study overseas, do you believe there are any differences in how your careers have progressed?
- 11 Do you have anything further to add?

Employers/Colleagues - For interviews regarding an individual alumni

[Validation question]

Could you please tell us about yourself? (What is your profession, or what is your role in the organisation?)

- 1 Could you please tell us how long have you known X and in what capacity?
 - a Did you know X before s/he received an award?
 - b Were you his/her manager?
- 2 To your knowledge, what skills, knowledge and networks did X use after returning to country X after completing their scholarship?
 - a Could you provide examples of how this was applied?
- 3 How did the organisation support X to use his/her skills, knowledge and networks post return from Australia?
 - a What was your role in supporting X's return to your country post award?
 - i Developing reintegration/return to work plan?
 - ii If so why? What did involve?
 - iii If not, why?
 - b Did X return to the same role post return?
 - c Did they receive additional responsibilities post return?
- 4 In your view, how did X's qualification impact his/her career?
- 5 Have you or your organisation benefited from any networks or friendships between [country X] and Australia created by the alumnus as a result of being an Australian scholarship recipient?
 - a Please explain further; who and what?
 - b What about any other countries?

- 6 Are you aware of any other links X has created between people in X and Australia as a result of being an Australian scholarship recipient?
 - a Please explain further; who, what why?
 - b What about between people in X and any other countries?
- 7 What more could be done to increase opportunities to create institutional links between Australia and your country?
- 8 How has having an Australian scholarship recipient in your organisation impacted how you view Australia and Australian expertise?
 - a As a result, do you draw on Australian expertise for your work?
- 9 What are some of the things that make it easy or difficult for women to progress in their careers in your country?
- 10 What are some of the things that make it easy or difficult for those with a disability to progress in their careers in your country?

Employers/Stakeholders – For interviews regarding alumni generally

[Validation question]

Could you please tell us about yourself? (What is your profession, or what is your role in the organisation?)

- 1 In your view, what has been the overall long-term impact of having Australian scholarship recipients in your organisation?
 - a Estimated, how many Australian scholarship recipients have worked for your organisation?
 - b How has having a number of Australian scholarship recipients over a number of years influenced your department's ability to achieve its goals and /or objectives?
 - c With regards to skills and knowledge; i.e. changed practices, processes or systems?
- 2 Has your organisation been able to leverage any networks or relationships as a result of having Australian government scholarship alumni?
 - a What examples can you provide?
 - b What have been the outcomes of this?
- 3 As a result of having a number of Australian scholarship recipients over a number of years in your organisation, have they influenced the way you view Australia and Australian expertise?
- 4 Have alumni proposed any links between your organisation and organisations in Australia?
 - a If yes what has been the result of these links?
 - b Benefits to you?
 - c Benefits to your workplace?

- d Benefits to your country?
- e If no, why not?
- 5 Are you aware if alumni have presented any opportunities on return to link your workplace or any other organisation in your country with an organisation in another country?
 - a If yes what has been the result of these links?
 - b Benefits to you?
 - c Benefits to your workplace?
 - d Benefits to your country?
 - e If no, why not?
- 6 What are some of the things that make it easy or difficult for women to progress in their careers in your country?
- 7 What are some of the things that make it easy or difficult for those with a disability to progress in their careers in your country?

DFAT

[Validation question]

Could you please tell us about yourself and your role with the Australia Awards initiative?

- 1 In your own words, what is the purpose of the Australia Awards initiative?
 - a In your own words how does the initiative achieve [points stated in the previous response]?
- 2 Based on your experience what would you say are the strengths of the Australia Awards initiative?
- 3 How do you think an alumni's participation in the Australia Awards initiative contributes to [Country X's] development goals?
 - a What evidence have you seen of this either personally or professionally?
 - b Do you think the program lead to benefits for both Australia and [Country X]?
- 4 In your opinion, how do you think an alumni's participation in the Australia Awards initiative contributes to a positive relationships between [Country X] and Australia?
 - a What factors/events have informed this opinion?
- 5 How do you think the Australia Awards initiative contributes to gender equality and disability inclusiveness?
 - a Let's start with gender equality
 - b What about disability inclusiveness
- 6 Based on your professional and personal experience living in [Country X] what barriers are there to achieving gender equality and disability inclusiveness?

- a Do you feel [barriers stated in the previous response] have changed over time?
- b In what way?
- 7 If you had the power to change things about the Australia Awards initiative what would you make different?
- 8 That covers the things I wanted to ask. Anything you would like to add?

Annex 3: Sri Lanka Case Study participants

Table 3Participants in the Australia Awards Sri Lanka CaseStudy

| Туре | Date | Name | Position or Degree |
|------|-------|--|---|
| | 06/02 | Dr Nalini* | Research – testing and verification |
| | 06/12 | Mr Samarasiri Sarath Banunusinghage | Founder and Director of Sigma Delta Technologies |
| | 06/12 | Dr Sarath Pathmasiri Perera Biyanvilage | a Professor, School of Electrical, Computer and Telecommunications Engineering, University of Wollongong; Technical Director, Australian Power Quality and Reliability Centre (APQRC) |
| | 16/02 | Ms Selvi Jayaganesh | Data Design Specialist, Commonwealth Bank, Sydney, Australia. |
| | 05/12 | Dr Sunil Stanislaus Wickramasuriya | Retired (December 2016), Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka |
| | 30/11 | Mr Tennyson Rodrigo | Retired (1999), Chemical engineer, former Managing Director and Chief Executive of Capital Development and Investment Company PLC |
| | 07/12 | Mr Wijaya (U.W.) Rodrigo | Consultant – Association of Consulting Engineers |
| | 07/12 | Dr Kumari Fernando | Dean, Faculty of Engineering, General Sir Kotelawala Defence University |
| | 02/03 | Dr Upuli Jayatunga | Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa |
| | 06/12 | Ms Chandrika de Alwis | Former Manager, Australia Awards, Sri Lanka and Maldives DFAT – 1988 to ~2014 |
| | 02/12 | Ms Krishni Goonesena | First Secretary, Development Cooperation, Sri Lanka and Maldives, DFAT |
| | 02/12 | Ms Pubudu Gnanissara | Manager, Australia Awards, Sri Lanka and Maldives, DFAT |

| Туре | Date Name | Position or Degree |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| Australia Awards South and West Asia | 02/12 Mr Pieter Bossink | Operations Manager, Australia Awards South and West Asia |
| | 02/12 Ms Sajani Ranatunge | Country Program Manager, Sri Lanka, Australia Awards South and West Asia |
| | 02/12 Dr Jagath Peiris | Chief Executive Officer, Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka |
| | 05/12 Mr Kinley Dorji | Secretary General, Colombo Plan Secretariat |

*Name has been changed at participant's request

