



Australia Awards

# Year in Review 2019

Australia Awards –  
South and West Asia



Below: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Rehnuma Islam (standing, Bangladesh), Drishya Gurung (seated, Nepal), Mohammad Sharif Ul Islam (Bangladesh), Zinia Anjuman Ara (Bangladesh), Samata Yadav (Nepal), Hafiz Qaisar Yasin (Pakistan), and Sampath Sri Sujeewa Basnayake (seated, Sri Lanka).

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Shanti Barma (Nepal), Jyotilakha Chakma (Bangladesh), Nim Dem Hingmang (Bhutan), Aishath Nayasheen Ahmed (Maldives), and Sanjeev Poudel (Nepal).



## A focus on regional expansion and engagement

### Australia Awards – South and West Asia had a successful year in 2019, characterised by valuable outcomes through scholar and alumni engagement, digital transformation and other significant achievements.

Notional gender and disability inclusion participation objectives were exceeded. More than half (55%) of Australia Awards scholars commencing study in 2019 were women. People with disability constituted 6% of commencing scholars. All Australia Awards scholars and Short Course participants who completed their study in 2019 satisfied the requirements of their study program, receiving a formal degree or a certificate of course completion.

Operational arrangements were rapidly established for a new country program in India. Scholarship promotion efforts in India began early in 2019, leading to the successful identification and preparation of a cohort of scholars to commence study in January 2020.

Short Course participants benefitted from cutting-edge training in fields aligned to national and regional development priorities. A broad range of Informal Learning Opportunities was provided, including two customised training programs in Mining Governance for Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum that were delivered by experts from Australia and from the Indian School of Mines.

Two Scholars Forums were delivered in 2019: one focused on meaningful development contributions and the other on commitment and action for gender equality. Attending scholars confirmed that, in addition to gaining knowledge and ideas, they developed new linkages that will benefit their future work.

Alumni continued to achieve impressive outcomes, as documented through the Regional Alumni Workshop. Over 300 alumni success stories were collected from applications to attend the Workshop. The 64 most notable projects (involving a total of 71 alumni) were selected, and those alumni further developed and refined the presentation of their projects at the Workshop.

Alumni took part in a significant number of socially responsible activities, including a tree-planting drive in Pakistan; a health camp, beach clean-up and book drive in Sri Lanka; and a fundraising campaign in Bhutan to support girls in one of the nation's remote communities.

Digital transformation led to significant web traffic and social media coverage, thanks to an innovative brand advocacy project and the launch of a new website, accessible to those with disability and responsive to different screen sizes and devices.



# Outcomes at a glance

**Outcome:** Alumni are making positive development contributions

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed 18 months after their return home:



**Outcome:** Alumni are maintaining personal and professional linkages

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



Among Short Course alumni surveyed:



Among Short Course alumni surveyed 6–12 months after completing their course:



**Outcome:** Australia is viewed as a valued international partner



Among Scholarships alumni surveyed:



Among Short Course alumni surveyed:



**www.** The Australia Awards website for South and West Asia underwent transformation and attracted over 6 million visits

**2k** Australia Awards Twitter and Facebook mentions of the Program reached an audience of almost 14 million, according to Meltwater

★ “Australia Awards does a wonderful job of supporting scholars in Australia. I received a high quality education and participated in multiple networking opportunities.

“I have learnt how to be a pioneering leader in my industry and I am now striving towards that goal. I feel as though I have discovered myself professionally and personally. I will be forever grateful to the Australian Government for this incredible opportunity.”

- Rehnuma Islam (Bangladesh)  
Master of Architectural Science  
University of Sydney, 2018

Featured (right) with Samima Shanta (Bangladesh)  
Master of Education Advanced (Educational Leadership)  
University of Wollongong, 2019



★ “I’m grateful to Australia Awards for providing me with the opportunity to study in a multicultural environment. I not only learnt from Australian water industry experts but also got a chance to discuss various water resource issues with fellow scholars and classmates from across the globe.

“Receiving this Scholarship has inspired and motivated me to make a positive impact in my country. My focus now is to educate young engineers in Pakistan using the knowledge, skills and expertise I gained during my time in Australia.”

- Saad Ahmed Khan (Pakistan)  
Master of Engineering  
(Water Resources Management)  
University of South Australia, 2019



## Australia Awards Scholarships

**The approach to Australia Awards Scholarships maintained its focus on the empowerment of women and disability-inclusive development. New opportunities were provided for scholars to engage in professional development and networking in Australia.**

In 2019, a total of 412 Australia Awards Scholarship recipients studied in Australia. More than half (55%) of those who commenced their studies in 2019 were women. Following targeted promotional efforts, including through partnership with Disabled People’s Organisations, 6% of commencing scholars were people with disability.

Scholars were offered a range of professional development and networking opportunities throughout the year.

A platform developed specifically for scholars was introduced as part of the Australia Awards website. Three Scholars Newsletters were distributed; these newsletters showcased scholars’ achievements, offered resources and suggested opportunities to help them make the most of their experience in Australia.

Scholars had the opportunity to participate, via a competitive selection process, in two Forums in 2019. The first Forum took place in Melbourne with the theme ‘Making a difference: Small change, big impact’. The event was designed to enhance participants’ understanding of how they might draw on their Australia Awards experience to make meaningful development contributions on their return home. The second Forum, entitled ‘Working together for gender equality in South and West Asia’, was held in Canberra and encouraged participants to engage in discussion, commitment and action to promote gender equality in their home countries.

Effective promotional activities and selection processes identified an impressive cohort of future leaders to commence their studies in Australia in 2020. Of significance was the design and rapid implementation of a ‘whole of Government’ approach to the identification and selection of the first cohort of Australia Awards scholars from India.

All scholars due to complete their studies in 2019 did so successfully and obtained their Australian degree. After graduating, all but one returned to their home countries as Australia Awards alumni to contribute to their country’s development.

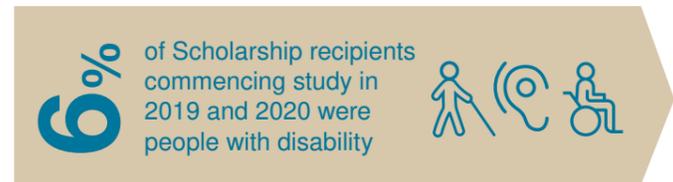


Image: Australia Awards scholars from Nepal at the Scholars Forum in Canberra. From left to right: Sangita Dandekhya, Milan Paudel and Preeti Maharjan.



★ “I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Australia Awards for providing me with the opportunity to acquire a Master’s degree at one of Australia’s top-ranking universities. Interaction with highly qualified and experienced professors enhanced my knowledge and skills in public administration.

“Networking with students from around the globe has also had a great impact on my professional and personal life. Australia is a country that welcomes people from different backgrounds, religions and cultures. Thank you so much, Australia Awards, for supporting me while I pursue my dreams.”

- Namuna Karki Dahal (Nepal)  
Master of Public Administration  
Australian National University, 2019

## Working together for gender equality in South and West Asia

Australia Awards scholars from across South and West Asia engaged in discussion, commitment and action to promote gender equality in their home countries at the second Scholars Forum of 2019, held in Canberra.

Under the theme ‘Working together for gender equality in South and West Asia’, the two-day Forum brought together more than 100 participants, including 69 Australia Awards scholars.

Joining the scholars were Australia Awards alumni; senior diplomats from the South and West Asia region; and representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), women’s advocacy groups, international development organisations, and Australian universities, think-tanks and research institutions.

The Forum opened with a Welcome Reception at the iconic Parliament House. Key speakers across the two days addressed important issues relating to women’s leadership, security and peacebuilding, economic empowerment, and ending violence against women.

Highlights included addresses by Dr Sharman Stone (then Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls) and Ms Janelle Weissman, Executive Director at UN Women National Committee Australia. Mr Paul Wojciechowski, Assistant Secretary of DFAT’s South Asia Branch, presided over the Forum as its host, while scholars themselves emceed proceedings.

Scholars’ experiences at the event were supported by thoughtfully deployed technology such as a dedicated event webpage; a digitally rotating gallery of alumni (women in leadership and male champions of change) for inspiration; live polling to aid interactivity; and real-time professional image distribution to assist participants in sharing their experiences on social media.

Outcomes from the Forum included scholars:

- developing their understanding of the economic, developmental, social and human rights benefits of gender equality
- identifying key challenges and ways to improve gender equality in their countries
- designing personal commitments to champion gender equality
- developing professional networks with Australians beyond their academic pursuits.

Survey responses from scholars who participated in the Canberra Forum indicated that:



Survey responses from scholars who participated in the Melbourne Forum indicated that:



Survey responses from both Forums indicated that:



## Short-term training

### Complementing Australia Awards Scholarships, customised short-term training experiences provided accelerated development outcomes in fields aligned to country priorities.

Over half of Australia Awards offered for 2019 were to undertake Short Courses, with 59% of Short Course places being filled by women.

Among significant Short Course outputs and outcomes:

- A regional Short Course in *Executive Leadership* delivered by the Australian National University brought together 28 senior professionals from across the region (see page 13).
- A Short Course for Sri Lanka and Bangladesh delivered by the University of Adelaide, the *Professional Certificate in International Trade*, led to all 26 participants being awarded a postgraduate Australian qualification.
- Seven of the nine Short Courses delivered in 2019 were iterations of highly successful courses previously delivered—adapted and strengthened for their new cohorts and contexts.
- As an outcome of the Short Course in *Paramedics Skills Development* in the Maldives, Griffith University and the Maldives Ministry of Health have developed training programs for health workers and ambulance drivers in the Maldives.

Twenty-two Informal Learning Opportunities were delivered, involving 234 participants across multiple thematic areas, including leadership, health, climate change, tourism and governance. Highlights included:

- Two cohorts of officials from Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum undertook training programs in Mining Governance, delivered in India by experts from Australia and from the Indian School of Mines.
- Seven alumni from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended former US Vice President Al Gore's Climate Reality Leadership Corps Training in Brisbane as part of a prize package awarded for their environmental protection projects.
- Senior Election Commission officials from Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka took part in the Australian Electoral Commission's Election Visitor Program.
- The Mayor of Colombo participated in the Asia Pacific Cities Summit and Mayors' Forum in Brisbane, providing an opportunity for her to meet decision-makers of the Asia Pacific's leading cities.
- Six Sri Lankan delegates undertook training with Tourism Research Australia in collaboration with Austrade.
- Seventeen Afghan officials were mobilised to attend training conducted by the Singapore Civil Service Commission.



Image: Participants of the Australia Awards Short Course on Women in Executive Leadership Development (Sri Lanka) with course co-leaders from the University of Queensland.

★ “Australia Awards has given me the career boost I needed. My learning has been supported, I have developed sound leadership skills and I now have international connections. The best thing about studying in Australia is its world-class education system—it provides a multicultural as well as diverse learning experience.

“My scholar experience was tremendously rewarding, with limitless learning opportunities and truly life-changing experiences. Now that I’m part of the alumni community, I’m more confident in my skillset, I have a sense of purpose to lead and I am well equipped for my next endeavours.”

- Wan Nie (Bangladesh)  
Master of International Business and Sustainability  
University of New South Wales, 2019



★ “Receiving an Australia Awards Scholarship has been a life-changing experience. The disability support I received in Australia helped me focus on my studies and engage in extracurricular activities that I only dreamt of previously. For the first time, I experienced independence.

“The professional network I built helped me understand the practices and policies in Australia designed to support people with disability; this has been instrumental for me to address disability issues in Sri Lanka.”

- Dr Samitha Samanmali (Sri Lanka)  
Master of Disability Policy and Practice  
Flinders University, 2018



## Executive leadership training for senior professionals from across the region

A Regional Short Course in *Executive Leadership* saw 28 senior leaders from the government and civil sectors of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka developing their skills for their nations' benefit.

The week-long training, delivered by the Australian National University, took place in Canberra and included a two-day retreat in Mollymook, New South Wales. The Short Course introduced a multidisciplinary suite of tools and concepts to enhance participants' existing leadership competencies.

As part of the course, e-mentoring took place with participants after they had returned to their home countries. Participant Mr Navaraj Dhakal from Nepal said that these e-mentoring sessions were one of the best experiences of his public service career to date.

Mr Dhakal added that he was applying lessons learnt in Canberra to build goodwill with other countries in the region, hoping it will aid him in resolving any trade-related issues in future.

Dr Alia Malik, a participant from Pakistan, felt that, as a worker in a small non-government organisation, she would not usually have access to the innovative concepts and toolkits used on the Short Course. On her return home, Dr Malik was looking forward to brainstorming ideas with her colleagues in Pakistan, drawing on her newly developed skillsets.

At the end of the course, participants envisioned that there would be many opportunities to apply their new knowledge with their colleagues and their community.

“I will apply foresighting and road mapping to develop a robust start-up ecosystem in universities in Gujarat,” said Anju Sharma, from India. Participants from Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed that they would be applying the principles of foresighting and strategic road mapping.

Mohiuddin Ahmad from Bangladesh said that he intended to use the newly learnt tools to experiment with “inclusive social protection” in the form of a pilot *School Meals* program, which he is hoping to help scale-up to all of Bangladesh.



“I enjoyed the experience and learnt a lot,” commented Mr Suman Dahal, also from Nepal, “and I am now part of an excellent alumni network.” Summarising his learning from the Short Course, he observed, “A visionary leader always worries about the future...[but] the adaptive leader assesses what kind of distant future we can have and what efforts we should make from today to materialise it.”

Mr Dahal shared his learnings within his workplace, the Ministry of Finance. He also wrote an article, published in a renowned Nepali journal, regarding his learnings from the Short Course.

*Top:* Mr Andrew Collins (former Assistant Secretary, South Asia Branch, DFAT), second from left, together with Bangladeshi participants of the Australia Awards Regional Short Course in *Executive Leadership*, Ms Fatima Yasmin (left), Mr Mohammad Tofazzel Hossain Miah (second from right) and Ms Mohsina Yasmin (right).

*Bottom:* Participants of the Australia Awards Regional Short Course in *Executive Leadership* with staff from the Australian National University.

# Alumni engagement

**Outcomes from alumni engagement efforts in 2019 included a high level of alumni participation in socially-engaged activity and alumni being better equipped to share their success stories.**

Over 2500 alumni attended one or more of the regional and country-level engagement events conducted during the year. These included:

- the Regional Alumni Workshop held in Colombo (see page 17)
- a reception held in Bangladesh for alumni of the four *Countering Violent Extremism* Short Courses
- a blood donation drive organised by the Bhutan Australia Alumni Association that attracted over 50 donors
- participation by Maldives Australia Alumni in an NGO fair to raise awareness of Australia Awards and to publicise the work of the association
- a lecture in Kathmandu by Dr Sanduk Ruit, a Nepali eye surgeon and former student of Fred Hollows, attended by over 100 alumni and guests
- a masterclass on *Development and Technology* in Pakistan, at which sector specialists discussed: technology and education for girls; digital rights; assistive technologies changing the lives of people with disability; and tech start-ups, innovation and development
- a roundtable discussion, conducted by alumni and industry experts in Sri Lanka, on the theme 'Education for Sustainability'.

To support collaboration within and among the various alumni Communities of Practice that have grown out of the Regional Alumni Workshops, a meeting was organised in Kathmandu to plan future joint regional activities.



**OVER 2500** alumni attended one of the 50 country-level alumni engagement events

An increased number of alumni groups involved themselves in socially-engaged projects, including:

- a fundraising activity, organised by the Bhutan chapter of the Australia Awards Women in Leadership Network, to support the education of 12 disadvantaged girls from a remote area of Zhemgang district
- the distribution of 10,000 acacia seeds by the Australia Awards team and alumni in Pakistan, in support of the Government of Pakistan's *10 Billion Tree Tsunami* campaign for a Green Pakistan
- various initiatives led by the Sri Lanka Association of Australia Awards Alumni, including a book drive for rural schools; a health camp for women and children on tea plantations; and a beach clean-up.

Alumni maintained their linkages with Australia, generating and maintaining organisational partnerships. An example of this is alumna Rawshan Sadia Afroz's ongoing efforts in maintaining connections between the Bangladesh Police Headquarters and Australian universities. Sadia has recently been central to the development of a collaborative activity between Griffith University and Bangladesh Police Headquarters to provide senior-level police training in Australia—with funding to be provided by the Government of Bangladesh.

Alumni were actively involved in Australia Awards activities in the region, including helping to promote Scholarships; sitting on shortlisting and selection panels; mentoring new recipients; and contributing to Pre-Departure Briefings.



*Image:* Erum Rabbani (Country Program Manager, Pakistan) with the Australia Awards – Pakistan team during the alumni seed planting drive, supporting the Government of Pakistan's *10 Billion Tree Tsunami* campaign.

★ “Australia Awards is one of the most well-organised Scholarship programs. The Australia Awards team did a wonderful job in guiding me both during the application phase and while I was in Australia. I developed long-lasting friendships and learned from some of the best minds in the world.

“I have returned home a much wiser and more mature person. My education in Australia has given me a renewed sense of faith and confidence to contribute to the development of my country.”

- Metho Dema (Bhutan)  
Master of Development Studies  
University of Melbourne, 2018



★ “Australia Awards has been an important part of my journey for self-actualisation. It helped me realise my full potential and provided me with exciting learning avenues.

“While studying in Australia, I was fortunate enough to attend three Australia Awards Scholars Forums that provided an excellent opportunity to network, share experiences, and learn from other scholars from South and West Asia. These Forums contributed to my personal growth and have inspired me to work towards the development needs of my country.”

- Mahroo Arshad (Pakistan)  
Master of Development Studies  
University of Melbourne, 2019



## Celebrating the success of alumni from South and West Asia

More than 70 Australia Awards alumni from South and West Asia gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the 2019 Regional Alumni Workshop—postponed to January 2020 for security reasons—to celebrate alumni achievements and success.

The three-day Workshop welcomed alumni from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who all had the opportunity to share their success stories and experiences, gain skills on impactful storytelling, and strengthen their professional networks across the region.

The Workshop was opened by DFAT’s Tom Davis, First Secretary (Development Cooperation), Sri Lanka and Maldives, who delivered a keynote speech on the workshop’s theme of ‘Celebrating Alumni Success’. In his remarks, Dr Davis emphasised the importance of storytelling as a tool for advocacy.

The program included masterclasses delivered by Digital Storytellers, a Sydney-based film agency, and Curative (Pvt.) Ltd, an event-planning company based in Sri Lanka. The masterclasses provided opportunities for participants to improve their storytelling and public speaking skills.

On the final day of the Workshop, participants used their newly gained skills in storytelling and public speaking to participate in a country-level competition at which they presented their success stories to a panel of judges headed by Victoria Coakley, Deputy High Commissioner at the Australian High Commission in Colombo. Fourteen finalists from the country-level competition then went on to compete in the regional round of the competition. The winner of the regional competition was Afghan alumna Ghazaal Habibyar, who told an inspiring story about overcoming barriers and breaking glass ceilings to make a sustainable impact in Afghanistan’s male-dominated political sphere.

The participating alumni were selected through a competitive process. More than 300 alumni submitted stories on meaningful development contributions they had made in their own countries, partnerships they had developed with Australian organisations, or pioneering accomplishments they had achieved following their Australia Awards experience.



The Workshop furnished an opportunity for alumni in the region to connect with each other and share information and knowledge. It also provided a professional development platform to mobilise engagement with alumni by improving their storytelling and public speaking skills. Subsequent feedback has indicated that the event successfully served its purpose of fostering connections between alumni across the various countries of the region.



**OVER 300**  
submissions were received, in the form of alumni success stories, for the Regional Alumni Workshop



**71**  
alumni participated in the Regional Alumni Workshop—the highest number of participants since these Workshops commenced in 2015

Above: Country-level competition winners at the Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka.

## About the Program

The Australian Government has proudly supported emerging leaders from developing countries in accessing a high-quality education and life experience in Australia for over 60 years. Currently, the key delivery mechanism for providing this support is Australia Awards.

Australia Awards are a central pillar of Australia's investment in people-to-people links with its partner nations—enhancing mutual understanding, cooperation, growth and stability in our region. Australia Awards equip recipients with the skills, knowledge and networks to drive change and contribute to the economic and social development of their own countries and regions.

Key objectives for Australia Awards are the empowerment of women and the inclusion of people with disability and individuals from traditionally marginalised groups.

In South and West Asia in 2019, Australia Awards opportunities were open to eligible nationals of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Through a range of modalities—including Australia Awards Scholarships, targeted Australia Awards Short Courses, Informal Learning Opportunities, and professional development and support for alumni—Australia Awards in South and West Asia aims to:

- develop capacity and leadership skills to enable individuals to contribute to development in their home country
- build people-to-people linkages at the individual, institutional and country levels
- support *Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* priorities.

Recipients of Australia Awards become part of the Australia Global Alumni network, connecting them to Australia and to each other—building a global network of leaders and advocates and establishing a network of ambassadors for Australia and its first-class education system.



★ “My Australia Awards Scholarship has truly helped me grow, both personally and professionally. It has been a very worthwhile experience that has changed my approaches and thought process.

“Throughout my time in Australia, I learnt invaluable knowledge from inspiring mentors. I have built networks and linkages with people from different corners of the world: their stories and experiences have helped me learn and taught me how to lead. I now want to pass on what I have learnt to others and help them progress, while also contributing to inclusivity and making a positive impact on development projects in the Maldives.”

- Hassan Nashrah (Maldives)  
Master of Project Management  
Monash University, 2019

Featured with Suhaida Ibrahi (Maldives) (left)  
Master of Engineering (Civil and Structural Engineering)  
University of Adelaide, commenced 2019

and Aishath Nayasheen Ahmed (Maldives) (right)  
Master of International Sustainable Tourism Management  
Monash University, commenced 2019



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Images in this publication are of Australia Awards recipients, scholars and alumni participating in recent Australia Awards activities.

To learn more about Australia Awards – South and West Asia, visit: [www.australiaawardssouthwestasia.org](http://www.australiaawardssouthwestasia.org)