



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2023

Australia Awards
– Sri Lanka



Highlights of 2023

A high volume of Australia Awards activities fostered and further nurtured strong ties between Australia and Sri Lanka in 2023—the first full year of post-pandemic operations for the program.

Twenty-six Australia Awards scholars (18 women, eight men) were mobilised for the first semester of 2023, including some originally scheduled to commence study in previous years. A busy schedule of scholar engagement activities included a Scholars Forum, professional development workshops, Indigenous engagement events, and Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) training sessions.

Effective promotional activities and selection processes led to a strong cohort of 24 applicants receiving Scholarships for study commencing in 2024.

For the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia Awards delivered a Returning Home for Development workshop. Twenty-eight Scholarship alumni who had returned since 2019 attended.

Three Short Courses were completed during the year: *Multisectoral Approaches to Nutrition and Food Security; Promoting Value Chain Improvements, Market Integration and Trade in Agribusiness; and Women Trading Globally*. Sri Lankan recipients also participated in three Regional Short Courses, all focused on climate change-related topics—facilitating the development of regional networks for collaboration across the sector.

Eight Sri Lankan alumni participated in the Regional Alumni Workshop in Mongolia in May, the theme of which was *Building back better: Climate resilience and green economic recovery*. The event saw the successful relaunch of the Champions for the Environment and Climate Action Community of Practice.

Sri Lanka's existing Australia Awards Women in Leadership Network joined forces with other chapters in the region, creating value and new connections through a new Regional Women in Leadership Network.

Ten alumni projects were funded through the Small Grants Scheme—an effective mechanism to deliver quick-impact projects targeting priority sectors and build people-to-people links with Australia.

Australia Awards – Sri Lanka facilitated public diplomacy opportunities for the Australian High Commissioner and other staff at the High Commission, including visits to grant-funded projects and meetings with alumni and Australian Professional Opportunity recipients. The program also supported the High Commission during a visit by the Hon Tim Watts MP, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Sri Lanka. From left to right: Madhushanka Disسانayake, Sharveswara Ratnasingam, Shaniika Chandirani Somasundaram, Subash Ravi Jayawardana, Manori Wathsala Disسانayake, Shehan Ruchira Jayasinghe, Prabhashanee Wickramasinghe Jayasekara and Tilani Sugandika Kumari Liyanage.

Image: Australia Awards recipients from Sri Lanka. From left to right: scholar Shehan Ruchira Jayasinghe and alumni Prabhashanee Wickramasinghe Jayasekara and Sharveswara Ratnasingam.



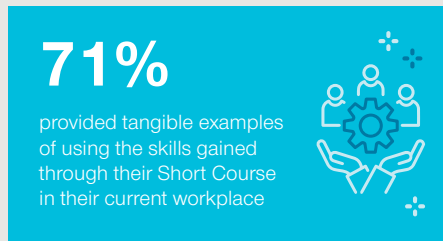
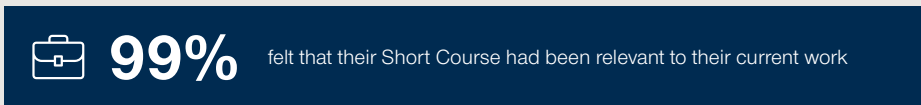
Outcomes at a glance

Outcome: Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:

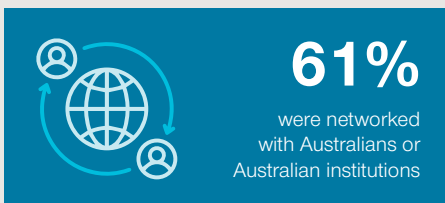


Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:



Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and Sri Lanka

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:

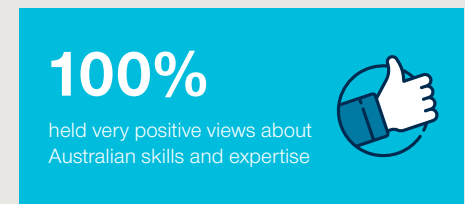


Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed in Sri Lanka:



“Australia is a multicultural country and Australia Awards brings together people from different parts of the world.”

– **Jumana Mohamedally**

Master of Inclusive and Specialised Education
Flinders University
commenced 2022



Australia Awards Scholarships

The first full year of post-pandemic Australia Awards Scholarships activity saw the highest number of Sri Lankan scholars in Australia in four years. It was a significant and full year for scholars from Sri Lanka, supported through a variety of engagement activities.

During 2023, a total of 61 Australia Awards Scholarship recipients from Sri Lanka (37 women, 24 men) studied at master’s degree-level at Australia’s world-class universities, including five people with disability.

All 15 Scholarship recipients who were expected to complete their courses in 2023 did so successfully and all returned home as Australia Awards alumni to contribute to Sri Lanka’s development.

In a new initiative to further support scholars to succeed in Australia, the program briefed Student Contact Officers from Australian universities on the academic and social context of scholars from Sri Lanka.

Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered 31 opportunities for scholar enrichment throughout the year. Sri Lankan scholars took up these opportunities 107 times, with many scholars taking up more than one such opportunity. A series of scholar enrichment activities had a focus on gender equality, including training sessions for scholars on ‘Gender 101’ and intersectionality.

Over the summer semester break, Australia Awards conducted six state-based Scholars Symposia. These enabled scholars to participate in professional development workshops with senior leaders, including the Sri Lankan Consul-General in Melbourne.

A total of 28 Sri Lankan scholars attended the Symposia and were actively engaged in the delivery of the events. For example, scholars Lasantha Adikari Gedara and Shanilka Somasundaram facilitated panel discussions in Adelaide and Perth, respectively.

In support of the Australian Government’s First Nations diplomacy initiative, Australia Awards delivered ten Indigenous engagement events for scholars across Australia in 2023, with Sri Lankan scholars participating 30 times.

As a new initiative, prospective applicants for study commencing in 2024 were invited to attend an online course advice session with the Program’s Academic Adviser.

After assessment and selection, an impressive cohort of 24 future leaders (17 women, seven men) received Scholarships to study in Australia commencing in 2024. One-third of recipients were people from ethnic minority groups.

Short-term training

With a special focus on economic recovery and climate change, 2023 was a busy and exciting year for short-term training provided by Australia Awards.



Image: Participants in the Australia Awards Short Course on Women Trading Globally (Sri Lanka).

Seventy-seven Sri Lankan professionals (60 women, 17 men) are now utilising new skills and knowledge as Australia Awards alumni after completing Short Courses in 2023. This includes 13 Short Course alumni from ethnic minority groups.

Three Short Courses were designed and delivered specifically for Sri Lankan participants:

- Twenty professionals working on agriculture and value chain projects in government, private and civil society organisations completed the Short Course on *Promoting Value Chain Improvements, Market Integration and Trade in Agribusiness*.
- Twenty participants from government, academia and non-government organisations operating in the nutrition and food security space completed the Short Course on *Multisectoral Approaches to Nutrition and Food Security*.
- Twenty women entrepreneurs who own and operate their own businesses (representing a range of industries) completed the Short Course on *Sri Lankan Women Trading Globally*.

Sri Lankan professionals also participated in four Regional Short Courses in 2023, all of which were focused on responding to climate change:

- Five participants (representing the Irrigation Department, Department of Meteorology and Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka) completed the Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*.
- Eight participants completed the first iteration of the online Short Course on *Water and Climate Change*, which focused on building skills and networks to tackle complex climate challenges.
- Four participants completed the second iteration of the online Short Course on *Water and Climate Change*.
- Five participants commenced a Short Course on *Accessing Climate Finance*, which they will complete in 2024.

These Short Courses enabled participants to form regional networks for collaboration to respond to the challenges of a changing climate.

Through an Australian Professional Opportunity, Australia Awards supported one alumna to attend the 7th annual AI (Artificial Intelligence) in Pharma: Clinical Development conference in the United States. This conference showcased advancements in AI with respect to drug discovery and clinical development.

Alumni engagement

Australia Awards supported Sri Lankan alumni in 2023 with professional development and networking opportunities to assist them to continue as champions for sustainable development.

For the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis, Australia Awards delivered an in-person Returning Home for Development workshop. Twenty-eight recent alumni attended, with more experienced alumni volunteering as mentors to help them refine their Development Impact and Linkages Plans.

Alumni networked with Australian High Commission staff and senior Sri Lankan leaders at several events in 2023, including a reception during the visit of the Hon Tim Watts MP, Australia's Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The High Commissioner hosted the launch of *A Celebration of Alumni Impact in South Asia* in May, attended by 45 people. The book celebrates the contribution of Australia Awards alumni to sustainable development across the region, and highlights the work of nine Sri Lankan alumni in depth.

Sri Lankan alumni had opportunities to participate in regional engagement activities, including the Regional Alumni Workshop (see separate case study).

The Sri Lankan chapter of the Australia Awards Women in Leadership Network formed a new working group with a view to increasing its activities. Sri Lankan alumni participated in two online events under the auspices of the new Regional Women in Leadership Network.

Sri Lankan alumni joined more than 100 fellow alumni from South Asia and Mongolia in two storytelling workshops, supporting their ability to communicate persuasively.

Through the Small Grants Scheme, Australia Awards funded 10 alumni projects in Sri Lanka, using the grants as catalysts to deliver quick-impact projects targeting priority sectors. The grants benefited communities by providing health services, skills development opportunities, economic recovery initiatives, digital innovations and safe water.

A Sri Lankan alumna participated in the first regional Australia Awards grants scheme, receiving a Women in Leadership Regional Grant to implement a transboundary project with fellow alumnae from Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

“I find that on a daily basis I am able to put into practice the skills and knowledge I gained from my Australia Awards experience.”

– **Wijikumar Kularasasingam**
Master of Public Policy and Management
The University of Melbourne, 2018



Case studies

Scholars gather in Canberra to develop enduring connections at the Scholars Forum

Eight Australia Awards scholars from Sri Lanka joined 47 other scholars from across South Asia and Mongolia in Canberra for the 2023 Scholars Forum.

The two-day event in April had the theme of *Networks for Influence and Impact*.

On the opening day, Sri Lankan scholars met with H.E. Mrs Chitrangane Wagiswara, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Australia. The scholars then enjoyed the opportunity to tour Australian Parliament House and experience the First Australians exhibition at the National Museum of Australia. Following this, the delegates attended a welcome function where they connected with representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the development sector.

During the second day of the Forum, scholars were welcomed on behalf of DFAT by Gary Cowan, the then First Assistant Secretary of the North and South Asia Division, who highlighted the role that Australia Awards plays in deepening relations between Australia and the countries of South Asia and Mongolia.

The event continued with panel discussions involving representatives from government,

the development sector and universities sharing their tips on establishing enduring connections.

Scholars were actively engaged in the Forum, participating in every panel, and engaging in discussions and interactive exercises. Sri Lankan scholar Shanilka Somasundaram delivered opening remarks on behalf of the scholars attending.

Sri Lankan participant Prabhashanee Jayasekara commented that she was "thrilled to have been a part of the 2023 Scholars Forum. It was an amazing opportunity to connect with other scholars, to learn and be inspired from their experiences."



Alumni collaborate on climate action and the green economy at the Regional Alumni Workshop

Forty-six Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia—including five from Sri Lanka—gathered in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 29–31 May for the 2023 Regional Alumni Workshop.

Under the theme of *Building back better: Climate resilience and green economic recovery*, the three-day Workshop saw alumni come together to share their experiences in responding to climate change and explore opportunities for collaboration.

More than 170 alumni applied to participate. Forty-two of these applicants were selected to attend on a competitive basis, with another four alumni selected as keynote speakers.

The first two days of the Workshop consisted of keynote addresses, panel discussions, alumni presentations and breakout sessions on subjects such as climate finance, climate justice, sustainable agriculture and renewable energy.

The final day of the Workshop featured site visits to sustainable businesses in Mongolia that aligned with the theme of the event.

Co-design and co-delivery by alumni was an important feature of the Workshop, with a total of 23 alumni delivering presentations or videos and 21 alumni facilitating sessions or sitting on panels.

The Workshop served as a catalyst for collaboration. For example, Sri Lankan alumnus Gowripalan Saravanapavan and Bhutanese alumnus Kuenga Namgay both delivered presentations on their biogas projects and shared ideas for future initiatives.

Participating alumni provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on the Regional Alumni Workshop, with all agreeing they made new connections they intend to maintain and 97% agreeing that the Workshop enabled them to make significant gains in their skills and understanding of climate change and the green economy.

The participants' collaboration will continue via their ongoing membership of the Champions for the Environment and Climate Action Community of Practice, relaunched at the end of the Workshop.

Image: Sri Lankan delegates at the Scholars Forum.

Australia Awards – Sri Lanka forms part of the Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia program and is managed by Palladium on behalf of the Australian Government.

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

To learn more about Australia Awards – Sri Lanka, visit: www.australiaawardssrilanka.org