



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2024

Australia Awards
– South Asia & Mongolia



Highlights of 2024

In 2024, Australia Awards – South Asia and Mongolia celebrated its largest scholar cohort in five years, achieving record completions and high levels of engagement. Alongside a rich Indigenous engagement program, the year featured expanded alumni activities, strengthened action on gender equality, and an increase in women's participation in Short Courses.

In total, 788 Australia Awards recipients from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka undertook education, training and professional development programs in 2024.

A total of 238 scholars completed their studies in 2024—the highest number of completions since 2015. In all, 349 scholars from South Asia and Mongolia were in Australia at some stage of their Scholarship during 2024—the highest number in five years, and 10% higher than the 2023 total.

The Scholar Enrichment Program mirrored focus areas in *Australia's International Development Policy*, including strengthening action on gender equality, embedding the perspectives of First Nations Australians and responding to climate change. The Program organised 24 scholar enrichment initiatives attended by 369 scholars.

The flagship scholar enrichment event, the Scholars Forum, and the conclusion of a series of six Scholars Symposia enabled all current scholars to participate in a professional development workshop.

A total of 125 participants from South Asia and Mongolia undertook an Australia Awards Short Course during 2024. Sixty-two per cent of Short Course participants were women—an increase of 15 percentage points over 2023. Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia delivered 24 Australian Professional Opportunities during 2024, supporting a total of 102 recipients and covering a broad range of topics aligned to country priorities.

The Program organised 67 regional and country-level alumni engagement initiatives—an increase of 50% over the total conducted in 2023—collectively attended by 2,328 participants. Grants were awarded throughout the year to support small-scale alumni-led development initiatives.

Guided by Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia's Indigenous Engagement Adviser, a series of impactful activities were delivered throughout the year to enhance First Nations cultural understanding and sensitivity of scholars, alumni and staff.

Image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Jigme Lhazen (Bhutan), Halida Mohamed Mahroof (Sri Lanka), Ram Pukar Mahara (Nepal), Zulzaya Nyamkhuu (Mongolia) and Fariba Halim Aurin (Bangladesh).



Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Md. Ashikur Rahman (Bangladesh), Rathany Balasuntharam (Sri Lanka), Shumra Ibrahim (Maldives) and Tsolmon Purevdorj (Mongolia).

Outcomes at a glance

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

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:

98%



reported that the skills and knowledge developed through their Scholarship would enable them to contribute to the development of their country



100%

believed that their Scholarship had provided them with a good quality education and skills development opportunities



70%

had gained career advancement within 3 years of completing their Scholarship, with 89% asserting that Australia Awards made a significant or very significant contribution to this success

Among Short Course alumni surveyed:

99%



felt that their Short Course had been relevant to their current work



100%

believed that the skills and knowledge developed through their Short Course would enable them to contribute to the development of their country

Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



95%

were networked with Australians or Australian institutions

50%



were using the relationships they established as scholars to help their employer to partner with Australia

Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



96%

held very positive attitudes towards Australia

91%

had very positive opinions about Australian skills and expertise

94%

had positive opinions about the people of Australia

Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni surveyed:

97%

held very positive attitudes towards Australia



100%

held positive views about Australian skills and expertise



The Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia websites had around

300,000 active users



Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

Ninety-two scholars from South Asia and Mongolia enjoyed enriching opportunities to engage with Indigenous Australians through Australia Awards activities in 2024. These activities gave the scholars an increased appreciation of Indigenous Australians' culture, history and achievements.



Image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Willum Warrain Aboriginal Bush Nursery.

One highlight of the year's activities was a three-day First Nations experience in South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park. Participating scholars learnt about the relationship that the Traditional Owners of the area have with the environment.

Sri Lankan scholar Thamarika Harshani Atukoralage said, "During my days in Ikara, I experienced firsthand the life of the Adnyamathanha people... This experience became the highlight of my journey in Australia." Pakistani scholar Saira Qayyum valued the trip's immersive learning opportunities.

In Brisbane, scholars undertook the Nyanda cultural tour, led by a member of the Jagera people who shared her knowledge of bush food.

In Perth, scholars had a cultural tour of the city centre. "This experience not only broadened my understanding of First Nations heritage but also instilled a profound respect for their traditions and connections to the land," said Bangladeshi scholar Shompa Akter.

In Canberra, at Wildbark, scholars undertook a Country walk led by a Ngannawal Kamilaroi custodian who introduced the scholars to the concept of Caring for Country. In Adelaide, scholars were led around Kaurna sites by an Indigenous tour

guide who discussed the history and cultural significance of the locations.

In Melbourne, scholars visited the Willum Warrain Aboriginal Bush Nursery on the Mornington Peninsula and learnt about the Koorie bush tucker trail, traditional huts and local flora. The tour began with a smoking ceremony and face-painting using ochre.

Nepali scholar Geeta Basyal said, "It was a great opportunity to exchange cultural traditions, hear about the importance of preserving culture, honour the past, and look forward to a future with understanding and respect."

In Sydney, scholars learnt about traditional methods of fishing and food gathering during a cultural tour run by Tribal Warrior Aboriginal Corporation.

For Maldivian scholar Aishath Dheena Shareef, the tour "offered an immersive journey into Indigenous history, where the stories and traditions of the First Nations people brought new meaning to familiar landmarks".

Ahead of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, scholars attended an online seminar on Indigenous perspectives in foreign policy.

Case studies

Scholars unite for gender equality

Fifty-two Australia Awards scholars from South Asia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste gathered in Canberra on 26–27 November for the 2024 Scholars Forum, which had the theme of ‘Working Together for a Gender-Equal World’.

On the first day, scholars attended the Australia Awards End-of-Year Event. There, they networked with scholars from around the world and members of the diplomatic corps, and heard from the Acting Deputy Secretary of the Multilateral and Europe Group at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

On the second day, the scholars convened at the National Museum of Australia for an all-day workshop, emceed by Nepali scholar Rakshya Risal. Representatives from DFAT offered welcoming and closing remarks, while Australia’s Ambassador for Gender Equality delivered a video message. Pakistani scholar Farwa Abbas delivered an opening speech on behalf of the scholars.

Three lively panel discussions, each of which was moderated by a scholar, covered topics such as the importance of supporting women’s leadership, perspectives on gender equality and intersectionality, and gender in development. In addition to facilitating panels, scholars acted as

speakers, country convenors and travel coordinators, honing their communication and leadership skills.

Through an interactive exercise, scholars applied what they had learnt throughout the forum to their Development Impact and Linkages Plans, equipping them to implement their learnings upon returning to their home countries.

Maldivian scholars Muna Adam and Ahmed Samah provided the final reflections on behalf of the scholars. “The Scholars Forum has not only shed light on critical issues but also inspired meaningful discussions about achieving a more equitable world,” Muna said.

Speaking after the event, Bangladeshi participant Shamma Arnab said, “I feel inspired and motivated to continue contributing towards a future where opportunities and rights are not limited by gender.”

Bhutanese participant Tshayang Choden said it was an enriching experience. “The forum provided a platform to exchange ideas, build meaningful connections, and reflect on how we, as emerging leaders, can contribute to positive change in our respective fields and communities.”

Image: From left to right: Shompa Akter (Bangladesh), Rakshya Risal (Nepal), Sarah Storey (First Assistant Secretary, South and Central Asia Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Muna Adam (Maldives), Prativa Khanal (Nepal) and Sarantuya Batgerel (Mongolia).



Case studies

Alumni support women's leadership at Regional Alumni Workshop

Forty-two Australia Awards alumni from across South Asia and Mongolia gathered in Bhutan on 22–24 April for the 2024 Regional Alumni Workshop, which had the theme of ‘Bridging the gender gap and supporting local women leaders’.

The participants represented a range of sectors (including education, health, public policy and law), but shared a desire to work towards gender equality in their workplaces, communities and countries.

Bhutan's Minister for Industry, Commerce and Employment, Namgyal Dorji—himself an Australia Awards alumnus—opened the workshop, welcoming the participants to Bhutan.

The workshop's first two days covered topics such as how to create respectful and equal workplaces, supporting indigenous women leaders, how men

can be allies for gender equality, and how to handle resistance to advocacy.

The workshop sessions included interactive group exercises, alumni panel discussions and keynote presentations from two alumnae speakers: Rani Yan Yan of Bangladesh spoke about gender equality for indigenous women and Hawwa Leesha of Maldives shared her experiences of creating networks to support women leaders.

On the workshop's third day, alumni toured around Thimphu and visited local initiatives supporting women leaders. Alumni volunteered as guides during these field trips.

Alumni contributed significantly to delivering the workshop. Of the 42 participating alumni, 35 delivered a presentation, spoke as a panellist or hosted a session.

Image: Participants in the Regional Alumni Workshop with representatives of the Royal Government of Bhutan, the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia.

In a post-workshop participant survey, 97% of respondents rated their knowledge and understanding of approaches to addressing gender gaps as higher than before the workshop.

Regarding the event, Sri Lankan alumna Upeka Thilimali said, “Together, we engaged in meaningful discussions, reflecting on our collective achievements and lessons learnt in advancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion. It was a truly remarkable opportunity.”

Mongolian alumna Badamchimeg Dondog said, “The workshop gave me an excellent opportunity to re-engage with Australian alumni across the region and share experiences of our respective leadership journeys.”



About the Program

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 development of their communities and nations. Empowerment of women and the inclusion of people with disability and individuals from traditionally marginalised groups are key objectives for Australia Awards.

Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offers opportunities to eligible nationals of

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through a range of modalities—including Australia Awards Scholarships, Australia Awards Short Courses, Australian Professional Opportunities and support for alumni—the Program 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 Australia's public and economic diplomacy agenda.

Recipients of Australia Awards become part of Australia's alumni network, connecting them to Australia and to each other—building a global network of changemakers and ambassadors for Australia and its first-class education system.

Image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni. From left to right: Divine Wealth Chakma (Bangladesh), Himali Dissanayake (Sri Lanka), Sokina Aktar (Bangladesh), Ahmed Naufal (Maldives) and Tarikul Islam (Bangladesh).



Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia 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
– South Asia & Mongolia, visit:

www.australiaawardssouthasiamongolia.org