



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2022

Australia Awards –
South Asia & Mongolia



Below: Australia Awards scholars. From left to right: Sibjan Chaulagain (Nepal), Iram Shabbir (Pakistan) and Enkhbaatar Oyungerel (Mongolia) compare notes on their first semester in Australia.

Cover image: In Australia – finally! Australia Awards scholars. From left to right: Enkhbaatar Oyungerel (Mongolia), Iram Shabbir (Pakistan), Dipa Rai (Nepal), Nikita Pradhan (Nepal) and Hemraj Shahi (Nepal).

Reconnecting and embracing new opportunities

Emerging from the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia approached 2022 with renewed energy and anticipating fresh opportunities. A significant year for Australia Awards, 2022 saw the first mobilisation of scholars since 2020, the reactivation of in-person engagement, positive outcomes resulting from alumni grants, and new possibilities arising from the merger of Australia Awards – South Asia and Australia Awards – Mongolia.

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) commitments remained a key focus, including through effective Scholarship promotions and selection activities which resulted in more than half of Australia Awards scholars commencing study in 2022 being women. Five per cent were people with disability.

Scholars were offered a range of linkages opportunities over the year, including activities with a GEDSI focus. New doors were opened in 2022 for scholars, alumni and the broader Program through the merger of the South Asia and Mongolia programs.

Short-term training activities saw the return of in-person delivery models as well as a continuation of online learning—a modality that had been extensively explored and refined during the pandemic. The year saw a busy schedule of Short Courses and Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs), including two multi-country GEDSI-focused APOs.

Australia Awards alumni took advantage of the opportunity to network in-person again while continuing to benefit from online events. Multi-country and country-specific events

brought professional development opportunities for alumni, as well as the opportunity to maintain links with Australia and with one another.

Forty-four alumni from across Program countries shared their experiences of implementing change, showcased their development goals and strengthened their professional networks at the Regional Alumni Workshop in Nepal. With the theme of *Leading and inspiring meaningful change*, the event was also selected as a suitable occasion to launch a high-quality Program publication, *Australia Awards: A Celebration of Alumni Impact in South Asia*.

Following the appointment of an Indigenous Engagement Adviser, the Program intensified its focus on First Nations participation and engagement. The Adviser briefed all commencing Scholarship recipients on aspects of First Nations history and culture. It is anticipated that this focus will lead to increased linkages with Indigenous organisations, communities and individuals and deepen the understanding of scholars, alumni and staff in engaging respectfully with First Nations peoples.

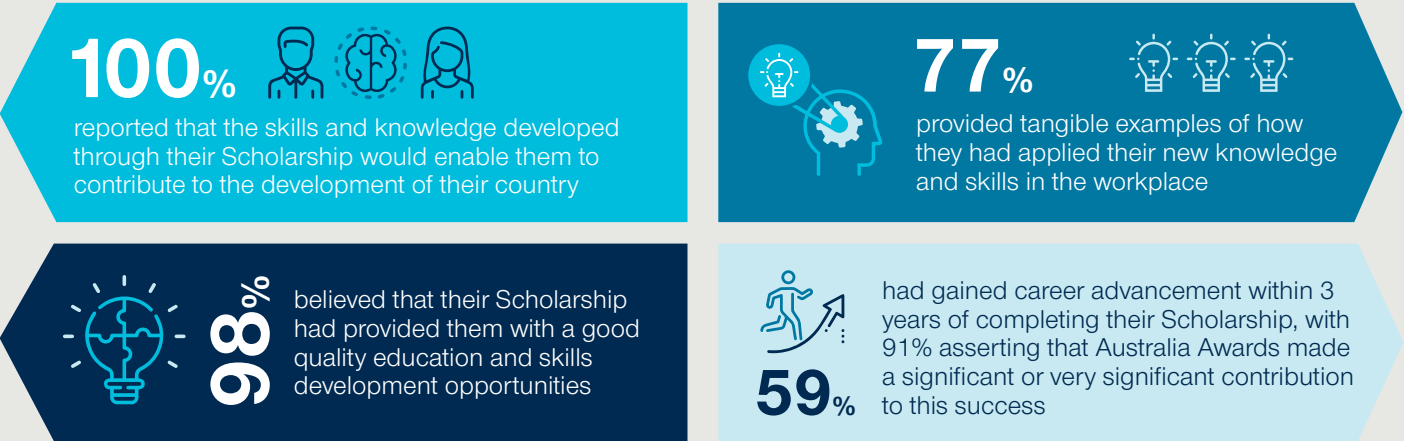
Another important area of focus for the year was the environment and climate action, with initiatives including a briefing on climate action for new Scholarship recipients, Climate Change Action Grants in Nepal, and the development of an alumnae-led podcast series, '2022 Changing Climates: Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow', featuring seven alumnae describing their work in responding to climate change.



Outcomes at a glance

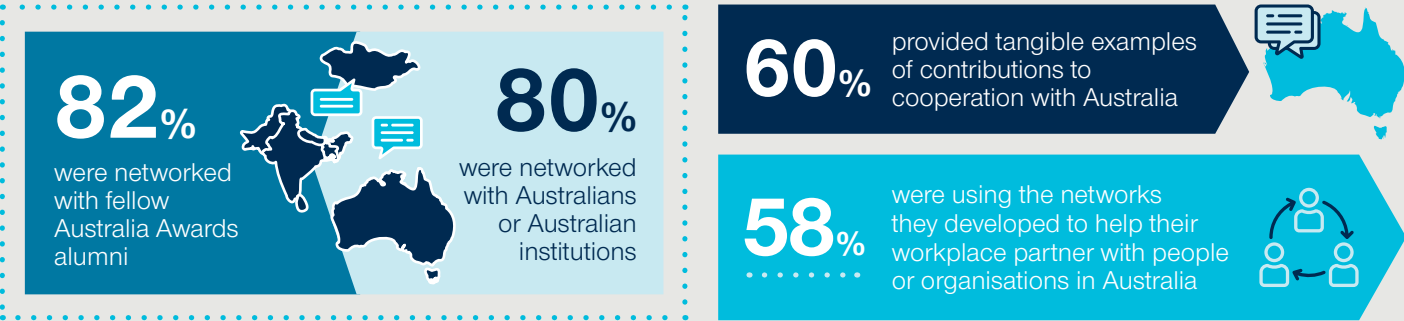
Outcome: Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



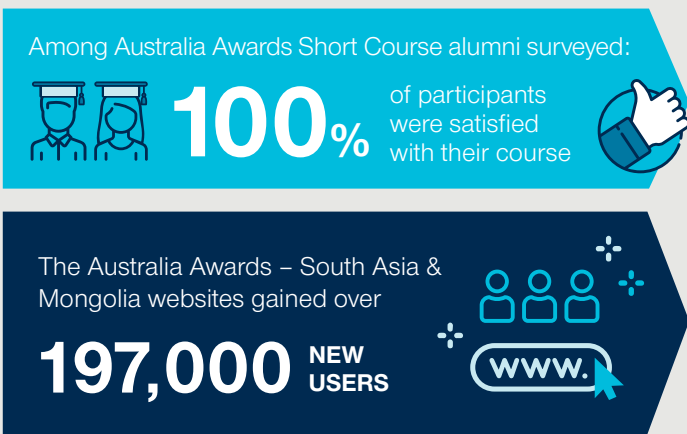
Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni surveyed:



★ “I am immensely grateful to Australia Awards for providing me the opportunity to access world-class education. I have been impressed by the unique student-centred teaching methods here in Australia, which I believe will enable me to grow both professionally and personally.

“During my time in Australia, I have been able to experience the diversity of a multicultural environment while building networks and impactful connections with people from all over the world. Through enduring relationships, an unparalleled learning experience and endless opportunities, I hope to become a transformational leader for my country’s development.”

– Nelushika Hemachandra (Sri Lanka)
Master of International and Development Economics
Australian National University
commenced 2022



★ “The challenges and uncertainty of the pandemic may have delayed my plans, but it could not stop my determination to pursue my academic aspirations. Finally commencing my studies in Australia after an 18-month wait felt like a dream come true.

“I have always viewed Australia very highly for its quality education system. I now feel privileged to experience the country’s excellent teaching and learning systems first-hand. My Australian experience is priming me to solve complex real-world problems and meet the demands of current advances in human–computer interaction.”

– **Md Tanvir Hossain (Bangladesh)**

Master of Machine Learning and Computer Vision
Australian National University
commenced 2022

Australia Awards Scholarships

As scholars were mobilised for the first time since 2020, there was a sense of activity, excitement and renewed energy across Program countries in 2022.

In 2022, the last of the scholars who had commenced their studies in Australia in 2020 returned home. Given the hardships inflicted by the pandemic, it is a testament to the resilience of these scholars that 97% of those who commenced in 2020 successfully completed their studies, were awarded their Australian degree and returned home to contribute to their nation’s post-COVID-19 development.

Promotional activities and selection processes continued during the pandemic, leading to a strong cohort of Scholarship recipients awaiting travel to Australia. These scholars-in-waiting remained engaged with the Program and primed for academic study through completing a purpose-designed Australia Awards Short Course in *Foundational Skills for Change Agents* prior to their mobilisation to Australia.

After much anticipation, 191 new Australia Awards scholars arrived in Australia in June. Fifty-three per cent of those who

commenced their studies were women, accounting for at least half of the available Scholarships in seven of the eight Program countries. Following targeted promotional efforts, including through partnerships with organisations supporting people with disability, 5% of the Scholarships were awarded to applicants with disability.

Scholars were engaged in a range of enrichment activities over the year, many with an important GEDSI focus. Scholars marked International Day of Persons with Disabilities with Michelle Ryan of Restless Dance, Australia’s leading creator of dance theatre by dancers with and without disability.

A series of workshops commenced in December across capital cities to support scholars in reviewing and implementing their Development Impact and Linkages Plans and offer training in digital storytelling. This was designed to complement the scholars’ technical knowledge by developing their ability to build networks and use contemporary tools to increase the impact and influence of their communications.



Image: Australia Awards scholars from Maldives on campus in 2022. From left to right: Azhan Mohamed, Aishath Reehaam Haris, Aminath Samaha and Ismail Shariu.

Short-term training

Short-term training activities in 2022 saw the welcome return of in-person delivery models as well as a continuation of high-quality online learning, broadening the reach of and participation in Short Courses and Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs).

In 2022, 410 participants undertook one of 13 Short Courses. Highlights included:

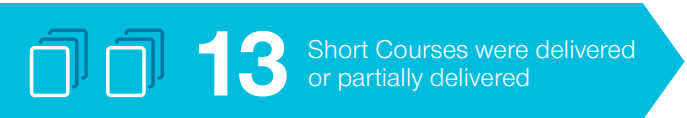
- The Short Course in *Using Social Media to Counter Radicalism* for Bangladeshis was delivered for the fourth time. There is now a Community of Practice of almost 100 alumni from this program who continue working in relevant roles in Bangladesh.
- Phase 2 of the Short Course in *Building Capacity in Vocational Training and Assessment* for Nepal was completed in-person towards the end of 2022, with participants demonstrating a strong commitment to the course, overcoming extended delays due to COVID-19.
- The online Regional Short Course in *Foundational Skills for Change Agents*, designed to prepare scholars-in-waiting for study in Australia, was completed by 189 participants from across South Asia and Mongolia.
- The Regional Short Course in *Governing in the Digital Age* involved 23 participants from seven Program countries undertaking a three-week program on producing, analysing and using data to inform policy decisions.

- Twenty Mongolian professionals participated in the Short Course on *Women in Agriculture*, receiving training on how to identify and implement policies to aid women in the agriculture sector.

The Program delivered 13 APOs in 2022, supporting a total of 143 recipients. Highlights included:

- Seventeen delegates from Bangladesh undertook an *Urban Food Security* study tour to Melbourne—an activity delivered through a partnership between the Australian High Commission, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Dhaka, and the Food and Agriculture Organization.
- Two iterations of a five-part webinar series on *Building Capacity in Social Media for Small Scale Enterprises* were delivered to Sri Lankan, Maldivian and Nepali participants.
- Twenty-five high school teachers in Bhutan learnt how to deliver online and blended learning through contemporary pedagogies and cutting-edge digital tools.
- In December 2022, arrangements were made to support two Australian Indigenous storytellers, Yvette Henry Holt and Graham Akhurst, to attend the Dhaka Lit Fest to deliver a workshop for indigenous Bangladeshi writers, artists and Australia Awards alumni in January 2023.

Additionally, two multi-country, GEDSI-focused APOs were also delivered (see page 13).



★ “My Australia Awards Scholarship has already provided invaluable experiences in developing my personal and professional networks in Australia. To date, I have established professional linkages with several environment-related organisations. Opportunities to develop further networks were presented to me when accompanying Nepalese delegates for a formal bilateral discussion with CSIRO and the Australian Government, in support of an Australian Professional Opportunity.

“The highlight of my experience in Australia so far has been working as an intern for six weeks at Thamarrurr Rangers, Wadeye, Northern Territory, with Traditional Owners.”

– Hemraj Shahi (Nepal)
Master of Forestry
Australian National University
commenced 2022



★ “I am grateful and impressed that Australia Awards not only focused on providing me with a world-class education but also ensured my wellbeing by allowing me to return home during difficult times of the pandemic.

“I’m so pleased to be an Australia Awards alumna. I feel proud to be associated with a program that is not only highly prestigious but is also considerate and compassionate.”

– **Bolorchimeg Jargalsaikhan (Mongolia)**

Master of Public Policy and Management
University of Melbourne, 2022



Advancing women’s empowerment through Australian Professional Opportunities

Two significant multi-country Australian Professional Opportunities supported 38 women leaders with valuable learning and networking opportunities.

Australia Awards works with local and international organisations to provide Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs) to participants from Program countries. APOs are short-term professional development activities offering valuable learning and networking, funded by the Australian Government to support leaders from priority sectors.

Of the 15 APOs delivered in 2022, two were multi-country online training programs designed to promote women’s empowerment: *Leading for Women’s Economic Empowerment* and *Gender Equality and Respect in the Workplace*.

Leading for Women’s Economic Empowerment, developed for women in early career stages and middle management, addressed the diverse barriers women face when accessing appropriate and safe work. Eighteen women from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal participated, broadening their understanding of what is needed to achieve transformative economic empowerment for women.

Topics covered included gender-responsive social protection systems, the links between gender-based violence and economic empowerment, addressing modern slavery, and enabling gender-responsive supply chains. Participant Namgay Choden from Bhutan commented, “This training has been enriching... and has enhanced my knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence and women’s leadership through discussions and coaching from experts and my peers from different countries. I was able to widen my network globally through this platform. All in all, it was a great learning opportunity for me.”



women leaders participated in regional GEDSI-focused Australian Professional Opportunities

With 20 female participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the second multi-country APO was regionally significant for South Asia. *Gender Equality and Respect in the Workplace* was designed to build participants’ knowledge and capabilities regarding primary prevention initiatives to counter gender-based violence in professional settings.

Delivered in the form of a webinar series, the APO covered gender audit tools, audit policies and practices, and planning for organisational change. It also provided an opportunity for the participants to establish a network among themselves and facilitate peer learning. Additional components included mentoring, sessions from guest speakers and a final symposium offering participants the opportunity to share their learnings.

“I gained valuable insights into the world of work, gender equality tools that are used in Australia and how organisations can improve gender equality markers,” shared participant Heshani Ranasinghe from Sri Lanka. “I was impressed by the expert panel for each section, the variety of aspects that were covered and also the one-on-one mentorship given to us during the course.”

Participants were confident they will use the insights from this training to make organisational changes in their workplaces to support gender equality.



Image: Australia Awards scholars on campus in Melbourne in 2022. From left to right: Shraddha Manandhar (Nepal), Nusrat Sharmin (Bangladesh), Radhika Orari (Bhutan), Puva Ponniah (Sri Lanka), Aminath Samaha (Maldives), Suki Byambanaran (Mongolia) and Tooba Khan (Pakistan).

Alumni engagement

Following two years of COVID-related disruptions, in 2022 Australia Awards alumni relished the opportunity to network in-person while continuing to benefit from online events.

Across the year, over 1,800 alumni attended 34 regional, multi-country or country-level events, assisting them to maintain their links with Australia and with each other. Highlights included:

- the Regional Alumni Workshop held in Kathmandu (see page 17)
- a *We Love Australia* function in Mongolia attended by 250 people to celebrate the contribution of alumni to Australia–Mongolia ties, with 2022 marking 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries
- a webinar series aligned to United Nations days of significance featuring Australian experts and hosted by the Australia Awards – Bangladesh team
- a clean-up campaign in Bhutan to coincide with World Environment Day in collaboration with four Royal University of Bhutan colleges and Royal Thimphu College
- a mini trade display at the closing ceremony of the *Women Trading Globally* Short Course which allowed the new Sri Lankan alumni from the course to showcase their businesses or products
- a lecture delivered by Australian public health expert Professor Rob Moodie for alumni in Nepal.

In 2022, alumni made a strong contribution to gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) initiatives:

- in its first year of operation, the Alumni Disability Advisory Group promoted greater inclusion within Australia Awards by examining barriers to participation by people with disability
- the Bhutan Alumni Association marked International Day of Persons with Disabilities with the Wansgel Institute for the Deaf

- seven alumnae participated in a three-part podcast series released for International Women’s Day (IWD) on the theme *Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow*
- an alumni expert panel discussion to mark IWD was hosted by the Australia Awards – Nepal team
- Australian alumni in Mongolia commenced the ninth cohort of the Women’s Leadership Program, which enhances participants’ leadership skills and understanding of gender equality
- alumni grants were provided to eight projects designed to establish communities of practice to support GEDSI in Bangladesh
- alumni donated books and essential library furniture to schools in a disadvantaged province in Sri Lanka
- alumnae from Sri Lanka and Maldives served as panellists at an Australia Awards Regional GEDSI Leadership Summit.

To recognise alumni achievements, the Program produced *Australia Awards: A Celebration of Alumni Impact in South Asia*, a coffee-table book with high-quality imagery and engaging stories describing the differences alumni are making in their communities. The book was launched on 14 June by H.E. Felicity Volk, Australian Ambassador to Nepal.



Image: Alumna Rajuna Singh (Nepal) as featured in the publication, Australia Awards: A Celebration of Alumni Impact in South Asia. Rajuna is a role model in Nepal’s disability community and is a member of the Program’s Alumni Disability Advisory Group.



OVER

1800

alumni attended one of the 34 country-level alumni engagement events

★ “I feel humbled and honoured to have studied in Australia on an Australia Awards Scholarship. My postgraduate studies played a pivotal role in shaping my career and personal growth. Along the way, I had the privilege of making invaluable connections with remarkable individuals who have continued to inspire and support me.

“The experiences and opportunities provided by Australia Awards have profoundly impacted my skills and sense of purpose and I believe they will continue to do so in the future. Undoubtedly, this Scholarship has represented a crucial milestone in my journey towards achieving my goals. I am appreciative of every opportunity presented to me by Australia Awards, both as a scholar and now as an alumnus.”

– **Nirmat Singh Brar (India)**
Master of Advanced Engineering
Monash University, 2021



★ “Having been out of an academic setting for close to five years, participating in the *Foundational Skills for Change Agents* Short Course not only provided me with a platform to interact and network with other Australia Awards recipients from the region but also acquainted me with Australian university systems and helped me in setting my expectations even before coming to Australia. This made transitioning and adapting to a new environment much easier upon commencing my studies.”

– **Chimi Dema (Bhutan)**

Master of Economics
Australian National University
commenced 2022



Grants for recovery

Australia Awards alumni use their leaderships skills and technical knowledge to make a difference in their communities and countries. To support alumni to have greater impact, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offers alumni the opportunity to apply for grants of up to \$5,000 for individual or group projects in key sectors, including gender, disability and the environment.

To respond to the pandemic, since 2020 Australia Awards has offered small grants to alumni for projects aligned with priorities identified in the Australian Government's *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* framework. These grants created opportunities for alumni to contribute to pandemic recovery and sustainable development in their communities, focusing particularly on economic recovery, health security and stability.

Following the success of the 2020 small grants cycle, further competitive grants rounds were implemented in 2021 and 2022 as the effects of the pandemic continued to be felt.

Grant activity highlights in 2022 included:

- Eight alumni grants were awarded in Bhutan to a total of 13 alumni in the areas of COVID-19 response, inclusive education, innovation and entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, mental health, and ending violence against women and girls.
- In Maldives, grants were awarded to five alumni projects that responded to the pandemic, including one which

provided six training programs for 168 participants on home gardening and farming.

- Four alumni projects in Nepal received Climate Change Action Grants, one of which resulted in a two-day intensive training course for 100 engineering students and academic instructors on renewable energy technologies.
- In Mongolia, four alumni projects were supported, covering sexual health education, support for children with autism, liveable communities and raising awareness of risks associated with domestic stoves.
- In Sri Lanka, ten projects involving 15 alumni received small grants. One saw 295 women and girls participate in a project which raised their awareness of menstrual hygiene management practices and reproductive health.
- The Bangladesh program finalised its Partnerships for Recovery Alumni Support Grant initiative.

Alumnus Syed Sadhli Ahmed Roomy was one of 20 alumni in Bangladesh to receive grants to assist vulnerable groups to address the challenges presented by COVID-19. The grant funding enabled Sadhli to scale up basic literacy computer training for 50 young people. “During the peak of COVID-19, we experienced a widespread loss of jobs,” Sadhli said. “This grant enabled COVID-19-affected youths and their families to access and thrive from an alternative income stream.”



48



grants were issued to individual or group projects across Program countries

34

alumni grants were issued for projects related to gender, disability and the environment



Image: Australia Awards alumnus Syed Sadhli Ahmed Roomy from Bangladesh.

★ “My studies in Australia are preparing me well for my return to Maldives, where I hope to have a positive impact on sustainable development and energy use. I believe the studies I am undertaking will help me cultivate a different approach to finding resilient and viable solutions to reduce the climate impact from the construction industry.

“Along with learning the management of sustainable projects, my study program is helping me understand the policies that must be implemented to close the gap and ensure a less damaging built environment in Maldives.”

– **Aminath Samaha (Maldives)**
Master of Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building
RMIT University
commenced 2022



Leading and inspiring meaningful change

Forty-four Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia gathered in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 13–15 June for 2022’s Regional Alumni Workshop, which had the theme of *Leading and inspiring meaningful change*.

Alumni from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka shared their experiences of leading change, showcased their development goals and strengthened their professional networks.

The participating alumni were selected through a competitive process, with more than 200 alumni submitting applications.

The Workshop was opened by the Australian Ambassador to Nepal, H.E. Felicity Volk. In her remarks, Ambassador Volk emphasised that the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic—such as shifting to remote work arrangements and adjusting systems for service delivery—had all underscored the importance of leading change.

A feature of the Workshop was alumni taking a leading role in delivering the program, with participants providing the four keynote addresses, facilitating sessions and sitting on discussion panels. This enabled alumni to both enhance their leadership and presentation skills and learn from the knowledge and experience of their peers.

Prior to the Workshop, participants were invited to submit their achievements and challenges in the form of development goals snapshot presentations. Sixteen alumni were selected to showcase their presentations during the Workshop, with attendees then voting for three to discuss in detail, sharing their ideas on how to overcome hurdles and increase their impact. Alumni had the chance to apply for grants for the projects presented in their snapshots and many have continued to collaborate with fellow Workshop participants on their challenges.

On the final day, attendees witnessed how two organisations with links to Australia were leading change in Nepal. One group visited Autism Care Nepal Society and learnt how founder and alumna Dr Sunita Maleku Amatya’s Australia Awards experience helped inspire change in Nepal for people with autism. Another group toured the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology and discussed the Institute’s role in improving healthcare services in Nepal and beyond.



Reflecting on his participation, Pakistani alumnus Gouhar Pirzada said, “the Regional Alumni Workshop this year has added yet another memorable chapter to my phenomenal learning and development journey with Australia Awards”.

Following the Workshop, collaboration between alumni continued with the formation of a Regional Changemakers Community of Practice. This has led to formal projects, such as a Nepali alumna and a Mongolian alumna co-designing an academic writing workshop, along with informal mentoring between alumni across borders.

OVER 200 applications were received, in the form of success stories of leadership and change, for the Regional Alumni Workshop

30 alumni presented at the Regional Alumni Workshop, including 16 who presented on their development goals

Image: Australia Awards alumni from India, Lakshay Jain (left) and Gayatri Pande (right), at the Regional Alumni Workshop.

About the Program

For more than 70 years, the Australian Government has proudly supported emerging leaders from developing countries in accessing a high-quality education and life experience in Australia. Today’s 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 communities and nations.

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

In 2022, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered opportunities to eligible nationals of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Through a range of modalities—including Australia Awards Scholarships, targeted Australia Awards Short Courses, Australian Professional Opportunities, and professional development 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 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 experience in Australia gave me a fresh perspective on life, including on how to approach and embrace diversity.

“I enjoyed finding my own path as a student and resident of Melbourne. Melbourne’s excellent public transport system, friendly people and the university’s strong support network have made my journey smooth, exciting and memorable.”

– Amna Ijaz (Pakistan)
Master of Educational Leadership
Monash University
commenced 2022



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 recent Australia Awards activities.

To learn more about Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia, visit: **www.australiaawardssouthasiamongolia.org**