



Australia Awards

Year in Review 2025

Australia Awards
– Bhutan & India



Highlights of 2025

In 2025, Australia Awards continued to support development in Bhutan and India by equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and leadership experience to drive meaningful change.

It was a year of growth for Australia Awards in Bhutan and India, with increases in:

- Bhutanese Scholarship recipients mobilised to commence master's degree-level study in the following year (13, compared to 12 in 2024)
- participants from Bhutan and India completing Short Courses (31 from Bhutan, compared to 20 in 2024, and 25 from India, compared to three in 2024)
- participants in alumni engagement activities in Bhutan (746, compared to 596 in 2024) and India (51, compared to zero in 2024).

In total, 88 Australia Awards scholars and Short Course and Australian Professional Opportunity (APO) participants from Bhutan, and 52 Australia Awards fellows and Short Course and APO participants from India, undertook education, training and professional development during 2025.

Twelve scholars from Bhutan completed their degrees at Australia's world-class universities and returned home as alumni, committed to contributing to Bhutan's development.

A comprehensive schedule of enrichment activities, including five flagship Scholars Symposiums, enhanced Bhutanese scholars' professional capabilities and facilitated networking with senior Australian leaders. Indigenous engagement was an important

theme throughout the year's activities, giving Bhutanese scholars the chance to learn about the culture, history and achievements of Australia's First Nations people.

As targeted short-term training opportunities to strengthen sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, Australia Awards also supported 31 Bhutanese and 25 Indians participants to complete a total of five Short Courses and six Bhutanese and 12 Indian participants to build their knowledge through four APOs.

For alumni, Australia Awards provided professional development and networking opportunities in Bhutan, India (for the first time) and regionally.

A highlight was the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka, which had the theme 'From inclusion to equity: Development for all'. Six Bhutanese and four Indian alumni joined others from South Asia and Mongolia at the workshop, which launched the Equity for All alumni network. This fourth regional alumni network enabled participants to continue collaborating on equity-focused initiatives for people with disability and from marginalised communities.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Bhutan. From left to right: Mahendra Adhikari, Tsheyang Choden, Karma Yuden Dorjee, Dorji Wangdi and Jigme Choden.

Image: Bhutanese Australia Awards alumna Aruna Sinchuri (left) and scholar Tashi Dema.

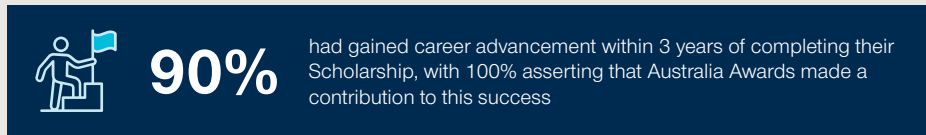


Outcomes at a glance

Bhutan

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

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Bhutan surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Bhutan surveyed:



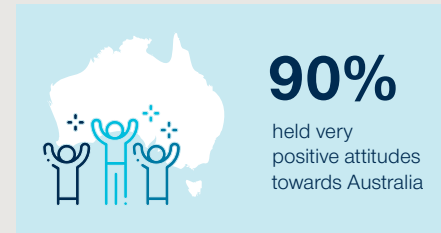
Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Bhutan surveyed:

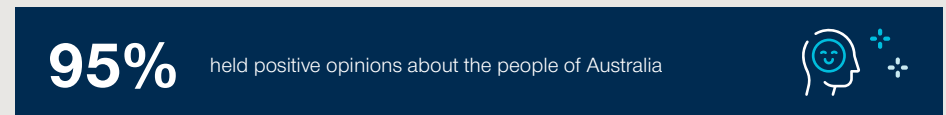


Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

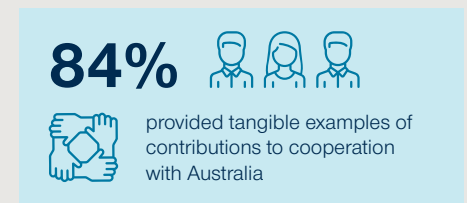
Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Bhutan surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Bhutan surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Bhutan surveyed:

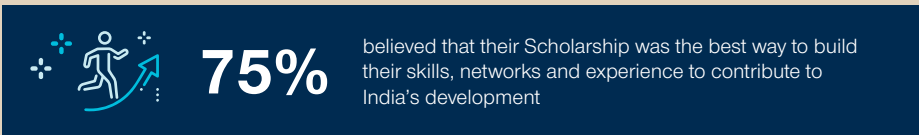
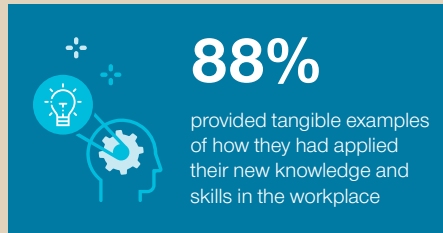


Outcomes at a glance

India

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

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in India surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in India surveyed:



Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in India surveyed:

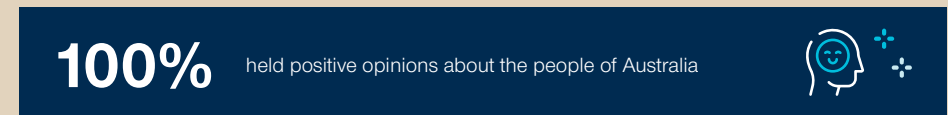


Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

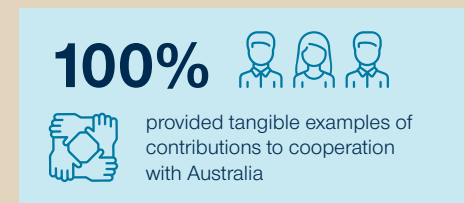
Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in India surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in India surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in India surveyed:





“My formal studies and extracurricular activities are equipping me with the skills to support startups, inform innovation-focused policy and promote youth-driven economic development. These experiences will enable me to foster an inclusive and sustainable innovation ecosystem in my community in Bhutan.”

Jigme Thinley (Bhutan)
Master of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management
The Australian National University
commenced 2025

Australia Awards Scholarships

In 2025, Australia Awards Scholarship recipients from Bhutan achieved strong academic and professional outcomes. During the year, 12 scholars (7 women, 5 men) completed their master’s degrees; all have returned home as alumni and are applying their learning in support of Bhutan’s development priorities.

At the other end of their Scholarship journey, 12 scholars from Bhutan commenced master’s-level study at Australian universities in 2025. This brought the total number of Bhutanese scholars studying in Australia in 2025 to 24 (13 women, 11 men).

To complement scholars’ studies and strengthen their leadership capability, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered 23 scholar enrichment opportunities throughout the year, including the flagship Scholars Symposiums (see page 09). Scholars from Bhutan participated in these opportunities 47 times, engaging in professional development activities such as grants, internships and online communication training.

After completing the *Communication Strategies for Becoming an Inspiring Leader* online training, Bhutanese scholar Dawa Tamang said, “The presenter not only made these sessions enjoyable but also captivated my attention throughout the two days and invigorated us with unwavering positivity.”

As part of a new initiative, Bhutanese scholar Sherab Jatsho was appointed a Scholar Ambassador in Victoria. In this role, Sherab promotes scholar enrichment activities, and acts as a voice for scholars from South Asia and Mongolia studying in Melbourne.

Consistent with Australia’s policy priorities, enrichment activities strongly emphasised gender equality, Indigenous engagement and equity for people with disability. Key activities included:

- immersive cultural engagement with Indigenous Australians (see page 05)
- an International Women’s Day online seminar with Indigenous women’s advocate Vicky Welgraven AM, featuring a presentation by Bhutanese scholar Jigme Lhazen
- a World Environment Day seminar with Professor Anne Poelina, highlighting the connection between Indigenous knowledge and environmental management.

Representing Australia’s continued investment in long-term development outcomes, 13 emerging leaders from Bhutan received Scholarships to commence study in Australia in 2026, an 8% increase on the previous year. This cohort included nine women, reflecting Australia’s commitment to equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender.

Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

In 2025, scholars from Bhutan participated in Indigenous engagement activities across Australia and online, alongside other Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars.



Image: Bhutanese Australia Awards scholar Tashi Dema (Master of Business, University of Queensland, commenced 2025) participating in an Indigenous art workshop.

The flagship Indigenous engagement activity for the year was a four-day First Nations study tour in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, South Australia. Through various sessions, scholars learnt about the relationship that the Adnyamathanha people, the Traditional Owners of the area, have with the environment.

Scholar Sherab Jatsho said the study tour offered an enriching opportunity for experiential learning about Australia's First Nations peoples. "While I had previously engaged with First Nations histories and cultures through reading and listening, this direct experience of interacting with community members and witnessing their way of life was profoundly enlightening," he said.

In Melbourne, local guides led scholars along the Aboriginal Heritage Walk at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. The guides shared stories of the land and its people, and pointed out native plants used for food, medicine and tools.

Scholar Jigme Choden said, "Although I had visited the Botanic Gardens before, this experience was truly different. Seeing the space through the lens of Aboriginal cultures gave it new meaning and allowed me to draw parallels with my own cultural background."

In Adelaide, scholars visited the Living Kurna Cultural Centre and participated in an Aboriginal art class with local Indigenous

artist Bryce Cawte, a proud Kurna and Ngarrindjeri man. During the session, Bryce shared stories of the land, emphasising art's role in preserving cultural knowledge, strengthening social bonds and expressing connection to Country.

Reflecting on the activity, scholar Bunisha Pradhan said, "It was a truly enjoyable experience, especially learning more about Aboriginal people, their traditions, cultures and the way they use art as a form of communication."

Scholars also joined Ronnie Jordan, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla woman, and Coen, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla Muruwari Ngemba man, for an online Aboriginal weaving workshop. Using materials received in advance, scholars followed step-by-step instructions to learn coil weaving and rope making, while Ronnie explained how weaving connects the weaver, their ancestors and the land.

Each of these scholar experiences helped participants gain deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous Australians' culture, history and achievements.

Short-term training

In 2025, Australia Awards delivered short-term training opportunities to 64 Bhutanese (32 women, 32 men) and 52 Indians (30 women, 22 men) in priority sectors, including governance, agriculture and cyber affairs. These Short Courses, Fellowships and Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs) strengthened participants' skills, knowledge and regional networks to contribute to development.

A total of 31 Bhutanese and 25 Indians completed Short Courses focused on sector-specific capability and collaboration, combining targeted learning, professional networking and site visits in Australia, as follows.

Twenty mid-career professionals from India undertook a Short Course on *Agriculture and Food Security*, deepening their understanding of agricultural innovation, food systems and trade through field visits and engagement with Australian experts.

Course participant Dr Chandra Shekhar Gupta said, "The Short Course was an enriching and transformative learning experience."

Twenty public sector executives from Bhutan completed a Short Course on *Policy Essentials for Senior Civil Servants*, gaining exposure to Australia's policy practices through interactive workshops and meetings with Australian agencies.

A further 11 participants from Bhutan and five from India completed Regional Short Courses, enabling engagement with counterparts across the region working in similar fields.

This included four emerging leaders from Bhutan and two from India completing a Regional Short Course on *Women in Executive Leadership Development*, focused on gender equality and women's leadership.

Participant Sonam Pem of Bhutan said, "The Short Course didn't just enhance my leadership abilities; it inspired me on a deeper level. It connected me with incredible women from across the region and from my own country, whose stories and strength have left a lasting impression on me."

Australia Awards also supported six Bhutanese and 12 Indian participants to build their knowledge through four APOs.

Image: Indian participants in the Short Course on Agriculture and Food Security at the University of New England.

One APO supported six high-level representatives from Bhutan's Royal Civil Service Commission to undertake a study tour in Canberra to engage with Australian counterparts and learn about best practices in public sector management.

Highlighting the partnership between Australia and India on cyber affairs, two APOs each supported five participants to enhance their understanding of Australia's cyber ecosystem and build linkages with Australian counterparts.



Alumni engagement

Australia Awards alumni engagement activities in 2025 focused on supporting professional development, building linkages and community engagement.

More than 740 participants collectively benefited from alumni engagement activities in Bhutan, and more than 50 in India. These activities included:

- an advocacy campaign in Bhutan to reduce plastic pollution by encouraging the use of reusable bags rather than plastic bags, marking World Environment Day
- a campaign to promote inclusivity in sports and education, celebrating International Day of People with Disability
- the first Australia Awards networking event for alumni in India, which was hosted by the Australian High Commission
- opportunities for alumni to engage with the Hon Richard Marles MP (Australia's Deputy Prime Minister) and the Hon Dr Anne Aly (Minister for International Development, Multicultural Affairs and Small Business) during their separate visits to India.

Regional thematic alumni networks provided opportunities for alumni across South Asia and Mongolia to engage on gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability. A total of 22 regional alumni events registered 94 participants from Bhutan and 63 from India.

Regional alumni activities included:

- training on applying online tools for digital inclusion, organised by the Equity for All alumni network
- a briefing for the Regional Women in Leadership Network about Australia's *International Gender Equality Strategy*
- a three-part training series on creating safe and inclusive workplaces, organised by the Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network.

Bhutanese participant Phuntsho Norbu said the Male Allies for Gender Equality training was “an enlightening and impactful experience that deepened my understanding of the important role men play in fostering inclusive and respectful work environments”.

Australia Awards also offered small grants in 2025 to support alumni-led initiatives in Bhutan and, for the first time, in India. In Bhutan, seven alumni received grants for projects in disability inclusion and disaster risk management. In India, three alumni received grants for activities on gender equality, economic empowerment and sanitation.

“Being part of the Australia Awards Short Course was both professionally enriching and personally rewarding, and it continues to deliver benefits as an alumna. The relationships and professional networks I formed remain valuable, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration and learning that inform and strengthen my work.”

Smita Chakravarty (India)

Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*, 2023



Strengthening climate leadership and resilience

Australia Awards is equipping emerging leaders from Bhutan and India with the skills and networks needed to respond to the challenges of a changing climate. Action on climate change is central to Australia's international development priorities, and Australia is committed to improving the capacity of partner governments to manage the impacts of the climate crisis.



Image: Bhutanese Australia Awards scholar Sherab Jatsho (Master of Educational Leadership, Monash University, commenced 2025), who completed the Climate Literacy training.

This commitment to action on climate change was reflected in the delivery of two climate-focused Regional Short Courses in 2025. Four participants from Bhutan and two from India completed a Regional Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*. Participants explored how stronger policy coherence between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation could support sustainable development.

Three Bhutanese participants and one Indian participant also undertook a Regional Short Course on *Accessing Climate Finance*, which built participants' capability to navigate the complex landscape of climate-related finance, international agreements, green banking and sustainable investing.

These two Regional Short Courses each included two weeks of learning in Australia, enabling participants to network with Australian experts, including at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Department of the Treasury, Energy Queensland, the National Adaptation Policy Office and the Clean Investor Group. Participants also visited SolarShare, Australia's largest community-owned solar farm.

The focus on climate finance capability extended to the Champions for the Environment and Climate Action alumni network, which convened two online events

on the topic attended by Bhutanese and Indian alumni:

- a workshop where alumni shared their experiences of accessing climate finance
- a seminar with Dr Oyun Sanjaasuren, Director of Partnerships and Resource Mobilization at the Green Climate Fund.

Speaking after participating in the latter seminar, Bhutanese alumnus Kuenga Namgay said, "This Q&A session provided a wonderful opportunity for us to engage directly with one of the world's foremost climate finance leaders and gain practical insights into navigating the global climate finance landscape."

Australia Awards also sought to strengthen scholars' ability to respond to climate change more broadly. A highlight was Climate Literacy training facilitated by Edith Cowan University. Over three sessions, four scholars from Bhutan joined 26 others from South Asia and Mongolia to explore practical strategies for reducing emissions, influencing policy, and driving positive change within organisations and the wider community.

Reflecting on his experience of the training, Bhutanese participant Sherab Jatsho said, "This experience deepened my commitment to lowering my carbon footprint and contributing meaningfully to climate solutions in any way I can."

Case studies

Scholars strengthen leadership skills at Scholar Symposiums

From October to December, 17 Bhutanese Australia Awards scholars participated in five Scholar Symposiums across Australia. These events were designed to help scholars develop the skills to be changemakers after completing their Scholarships.

Delivering opening remarks in Melbourne on behalf of the scholars, Sherab Jatsho said, “This Scholarship symbolises more than an academic opportunity; it represents hope, responsibility and the power to contribute meaningfully to positive change.”

A highlight of each symposium was a panel of experts on leadership. These panellists included:

- Senator Charlotte Walker, the youngest person elected to Australia’s Senate, in Adelaide
- former Australian Heads of Mission Paul Stephens, in Melbourne, and Sue Boyd, in Perth
- Katie Smith, Director of DFAT’s South Asia & Mongolia Section, in Canberra.

The panellists spoke about various leadership topics, including the importance of values for leaders, tips for networking and advice on advocating for change. “Listening to the panellists, I realised how important

networking is for both personal rapport and official engagement,” said Canberra-based scholar Sangay Wangdi.

The first afternoon of each symposium was dedicated to training to help scholars apply what they had heard across the morning. Sherab Jatsho said that this was “a particular highlight, offering meaningful insights that will continue to inform our professional growth”.

On the second day of the symposiums, scholars examined their Development Impact and Linkages Plans and whether they needed updating.

Each symposium concluded with scholars engaging with First Nations Australians. Activities included art lessons from Indigenous teachers and learning to throw a boomerang. Brisbane-based scholar Tashi Dema said, “It was my first time holding a boomerang, and I had a great time learning about its significance.”

For many attendees, the most valuable aspect of the events was the opportunity to network with other scholars from the region. “The Australia Awards Scholars Symposium didn’t just open doors, it built bridges,” said Melbourne-based scholar Dorji Wangdi. “I discovered the power of networking and formed lasting bonds.”

Summing up the views of many, scholar Tsheyang Choden said, “The Symposium has been very insightful. The facilitators and panel members were all very knowledgeable and inspiring.”

Alumni unite for equity and development

Six Bhutanese and four Indians were among the 51 Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia who attended the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Sri Lanka on 7–9 April.

The workshop’s theme was ‘From inclusion to equity: Development for all’. Through alumni presentations, panel discussions and group exercises, attendees discussed advocacy for the rights of people with disability and people from traditionally marginalised communities. Thirteen participants were people with disability.

Opening the event, HE Mr Paul Stephens, Australia’s then High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, said, “The workshop theme recognises that it is not enough to seek inclusion for people from marginalised communities and people with disability ... rather, we must tackle the unequal power systems and structures that hinder economic growth and human development.”

Bhutanese and Indian alumni played a central role in delivering the workshop: Tashi Wangchuk (Bhutan) and Jatin Pawar (India) each delivered a presentation showcasing their development work, while Tara Devi Giri (Bhutan) and Sagar Asapur (India) were panellists.

The workshop featured three keynote presentations, each followed by a discussion

panel featuring alumni. These presentations and panels covered topics such as advocacy by and for people with disability, the importance of making education accessible to all, and why development practitioners working with people with disability and from minority communities should consider intersectionality.

Participants also examined common challenges—dividing into groups to brainstorm approaches to each challenge, then presenting their ideas. Tashi Wangchuk led a discussion about how societal attitudes to people with disability or from traditionally marginalised communities can affect their education outcomes.

The workshop marked ten years since the inaugural Regional Alumni Workshop, at which the Women in Leadership Network was launched. The 2025 workshop saw the launch of the Equity for All alumni network, enabling participants to collaborate beyond the event.



Image: Bhutanese Australia Awards alumna Tara Devi Giri (Master of Education [Inclusive and Special Education], Monash University, 2016) at the Regional Alumni Workshop.

Australia Awards – Bhutan and Australia Awards – India form part of the Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia Program, 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 visit:

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