



Australia Awards

Australia Awards Alumni Contributing to Civil Society:

Supporting development
through volunteerism

September 2022



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Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Acknowledgement of Country:

In the spirit of reconciliation, the authors would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, including the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, where this report was written, and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to contribute to our work to improve learning, education and research.

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Executive Summary

The Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) is a research program developed to provide evidence of the long-term outcomes of alumni of development scholarships funded by the Australian Government. This report looks at these outcomes through the lens of volunteerism and community leadership – encapsulated in the concept of contributions to civil society. It is the first detailed study by the GTF specifically focused on alumni contributions outside of their paid employment.

The report uses data from thousands of alumni to build a broad understanding of alumni leadership in their communities. It then focuses on information collected through in-depth interviews with eight alumni from across the Pacific and South-East Asia to better understand the diverse ways alumni are contributing to development through volunteerism and activities outside of their paid work.

This GTF case study was developed around three broad objectives. They are listed below, with a summary of the findings from this research.

Objective 1: Explore the types of contributions alumni make to civil society through volunteerism and community engagement.

Alumni of Australian development scholarships contribute broadly to civil society through a range of activities. Data from the GTF Global Tracer Survey showed about one quarter of all alumni are *leaders* within their community, and that these roles span a spectrum of organisations, sectors and types of community.

Detailed insight from interviews with alumni highlights the ways in which they are contributing to civil society through volunteerism. Featured in this case study are scholarship and fellowship alumni engaged in inspiring activities that help others. They include:

- The ‘Alumni of the Year’ from Timor-Leste using her prize money to build a business that employs women in need;
- An alum from Vietnam committed to ‘paying it forward’ through philanthropic support to help young people;
- A Filipino alum leading a global professional body advocating for adult learning and education to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 – *all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development*;
- A Cambodian alum returning to his parent’s village to develop educational infrastructure and resources to break the poverty cycle;
- A Vietnamese alumna committing to decades of grassroots volunteering to tackle the issue of waste management and transform the heart of Hanoi;
- A Samoan alumna with a Master of Cyber Security inspiring Samoan girls to embrace IT careers;
- An alum from the Philippines who dedicates his time to campaigning for right-based disability inclusion; and
- A Fijian alumna working through her church to strengthen community connections through technology.

Objective 2: Examine whether these activities contribute to achieving the overall Program Outcomes of the Australia Awards.

The Program Outcomes of the Australia Awards, that ‘alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development’ and ‘alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries’ are both shown to be achieved through the detailed examples in this case study.

It is widely accepted that engagement in civil society helps strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state, building partnerships to tackle development challenges and create more inclusive, stable societies. At the individual level, engagement in civil society provides a sense of community, purpose, and wellbeing. While at the societal level, volunteerism supports ‘good governance, citizenship, and the accountability of the state’ (Development Asia, 2019, p. 2) by providing citizens with agency to lead social change and meet gaps in community needs not being addressed by the state or the private sector. These aspects are evident in the alumni examples detailed in this report and align very closely with the first Program Outcome of the Australia Awards.

Furthermore, examples from some of the alumni featured in this report highlight the way in which connections with Australia have helped inspire, contribute to and develop the activities and engagement that are being made by alumni.

Objective 3: Understand and document the role of the Australia Awards in helping alumni make contributions to civil society.

Attributing the Australia Awards to the contributions of alumni to civil society presents challenges, especially given that the very nature of the Australia Awards and predecessor scholarship programs is to identify candidates who are likely to already be contributing to a range of ways to their communities. However, alumni in this study spoke strongly and passionately about how their award and their experience in Australia shaped their contributions in the years following their study.

Specifically, each alum was able to pinpoint aspects of their award that continue to influence their contributions to their communities today. These influences broadly cover three areas:

- *Changing attitudes* – many alumni noted the transformational experience of being in Australia on award embedded a motivation to ‘give back’ and contribute beyond the world of work on return.
- *Networks from Australia* – continue to play a strong role in facilitating the contributions of alumni in their communities. This has included ongoing connections with on-award mentors and advocacy-based organisations in Australia.
- *Knowledge and skills developed on award* – alumni noted both technical skills specific to the subject matter of their courses and general skills such as planning as continuing to be important in facilitating the way they approach their unpaid work within civil society.

Implications of these findings

This research demonstrates that the Australia Awards go beyond providing human resource capacity development for the labour market. Alumni of the Australia Awards are using the skills, knowledge and networks gained through scholarships and fellowships to contribute to development not only through paid work, but also through their volunteerism in civil society.

A key implication of these findings is the need to broaden contemporary understanding of the ways that alumni of the Australia Awards are contributing to development. There is a need to look beyond the workplace and build evidence of the broader societal impact these leaders have across their communities.

In working towards this, the GTF is currently adjusting its survey and case study instruments to collect information more specifically relating to volunteerism and advocacy, with the intention that these will begin to help address these gaps in our understanding of the impact of alumni outside their paid employment. As part of this future research, GTF researchers will work across the Australia Awards Monitoring and Evaluation Community of Practice to help develop a shared understanding of approaches to collecting further information from alumni and analysing the outcomes in both a local and global context.



Australia Awards

Global Tracer Facility



Australia Awards Alumni contributing to civil society: supporting development through volunteerism

This case study investigates the contribution to development of Australia Awards alumni who are active in civil society through advocacy and volunteerism. It draws on GTF survey data from thousands of alumni and then uses interviews with 8 alumni from across the Pacific and South-East Asia to better understand the diverse ways alumni are agents of change, contributing to development through engagement in their local communities.

These Australia Awards alumni are contributing to:



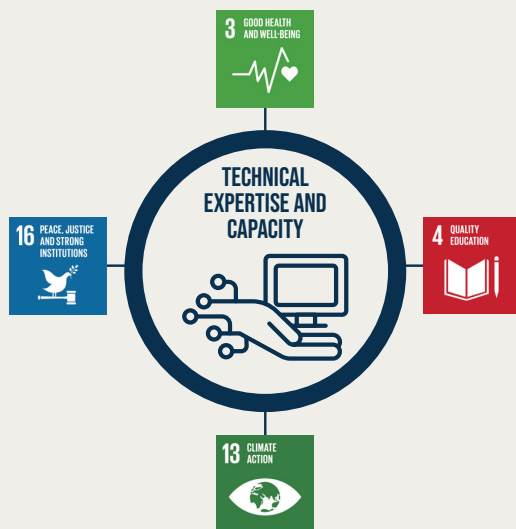
“The most valuable part of our voluntary work is to raise public awareness on environment protection”

Ms Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong. Retired Climate Scientist and volunteer, Vietnam.



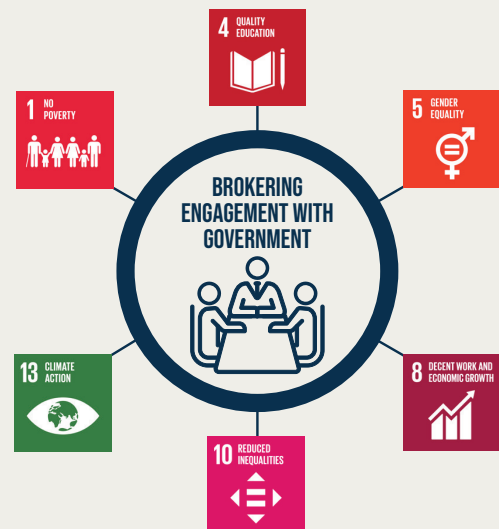
Ms Neemia co-funded Geek Girl Academy Samoa to help girls “get interested in pursuing IT” careers.

Ms Tagiilima Neemia. Co-founder Geek Girl Academy, Samoa



Through his charity work, Mr Neb provides technical assistance and funding “to break the poverty cycle” in rural communities in Cambodia.

Mr Sinthay Neb, Development Expert and Co-founder of the charity Sangkheum Kumar Kampuchea, Cambodia.



“There are only a few of us Filipinos with disabilities who happened to go to school. As our way of paying back to our sector, we are involving ourselves in policy formulation, in the drafting of human rights programs and services.”

Mr Ronnel del Rio. Public Servant and Disability Advocate, Philippines

1. Introduction

The Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) is a research program developed to provide evidence of the long-term outcomes of alumni of development scholarships funded by the Australian Government. This report looks at these outcomes through the lens of volunteerism and community leadership – encapsulated in the concept of contributions to civil society. It is the first detailed study by the GTF specifically focused on alumni contributions outside of their paid employment. This study includes analysis of a large-scale global survey conducted by the GTF, as well as eight in-depth interviews with alumni making contributions to civil society through their roles in their communities.

In developing this work, the GTF have broadly based the analysis and understanding on the definition of civil society developed by the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics:

Civil society refers to the arena of un-coerced, collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors, and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy, and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions, and advocacy groups. (Centre for Civil Society, 2006)

According to the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), engagement in civil society helps strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state, building partnerships to tackle development challenges and create more inclusive, stable societies (UNV, 2021).

1.1 Objectives

The key objectives of this case study are to:

- Explore the types of contributions alumni make to civil society through volunteerism and community engagement (outside of their paid work).
- Examine whether these activities contribute to achieving the overall Program Outcomes of the Australia Awards.
- Understand and document the role the Australia Awards experience, skills, knowledge and networks play in helping alumni contribute to civil society.

In addition to these specific aims, research by the GTF is designed to provide insight and evidence into the overall Goal of the Australia Awards and the two long-term Program Outcomes outlined in the Australia Awards Global Strategy and Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework¹ (Figure 1).

¹ For further information on both the Strategy and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, see: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/australia-awards-global-strategic-framework-and-global-monitoring-and-evaluation-framework#global-strategic-framework>

1.2 Importance of engagement in civil society for the outcomes of the Australia Awards

Often in documenting the outcomes of the Australia Awards, alumni achievement in their paid work is the focus of discussion, analysis and dissemination. However, contributions outside of employment, especially through engagement in civil society, are arguably just as important achievements in fulfilling the long-term aims of the Australia Awards.

Therefore, it is important to better understand the ways in which alumni engage with civil society and contribute to development through volunteerism. This study hypothesised the Australia Awards are supporting contributions to civil society because prior research has shown alumni often return home with increased motivation and confidence to make a difference by using skills, knowledge and networks developed on award to support inclusive and sustainable development. The evidence collected and analysed in this report aims to provide specific detail on how these ‘tools’ provided by the Australia Awards are being used by alumni to make contributions to civil society.

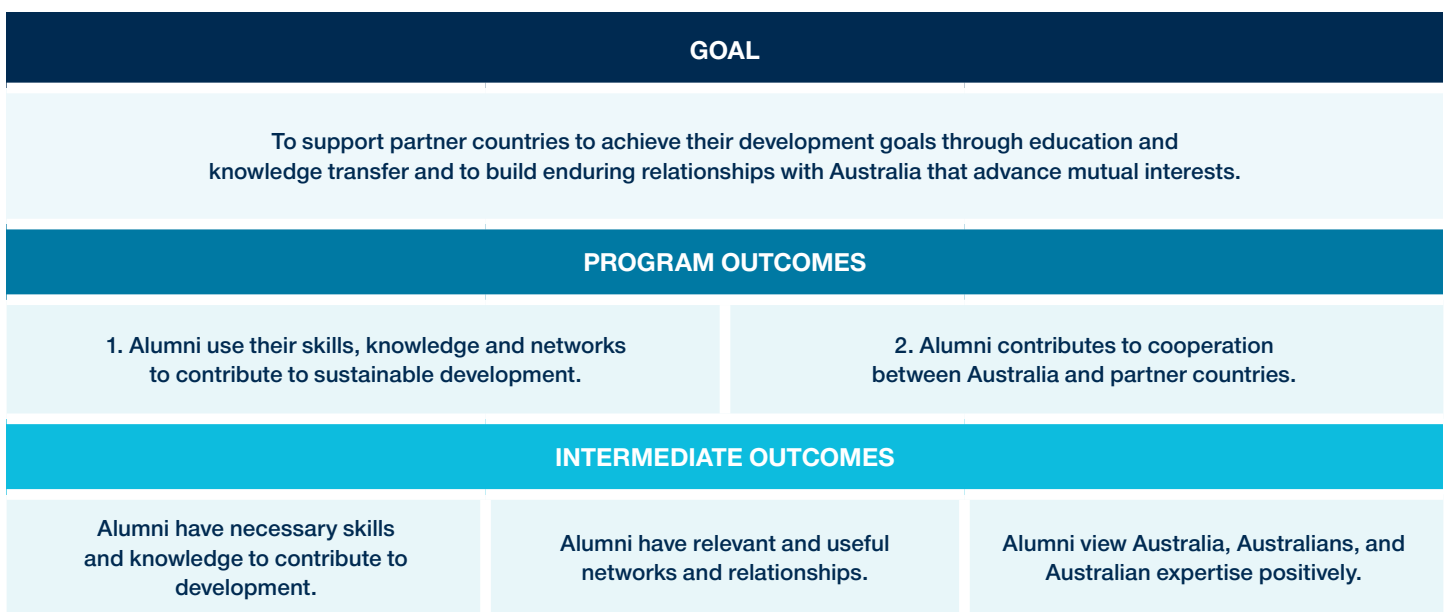
1.2.1 Volunteerism in civil society

It is important to note that notions of volunteerism differ across the globe, and are shaped by a range of ‘cultural, social, and political dimensions’ (Georgeou, 2020). This understanding is particularly important in the context of exploring development outcomes of alumni within their own contexts.

At the core of most volunteering is the desire to help others to build a better community. Volunteering also benefits individuals and organisations through expanded networks, exchange of skills and knowledge, and improved wellbeing and social capital (Millora, 2020). At the societal level, volunteerism supports ‘good governance, citizenship, and the accountability of the state’ (Development Asia, 2019, p. 2) through providing citizens with the agency to lead social change and meet gaps in community needs not being addressed by the state or the private sector (Bhargava, 2015).

Volunteering is both a means and an end to achieving, challenging, disrupting and even shaping development outcomes (Millora, 2020, p. 19).

Figure 1: Australia Awards overall goal and intended outcomes (DFAT, 2022)



1.3 Scope and approach

The approach to data collection and analysis in this report has been designed to ensure the breadth of alumni contributions across civil society are better understood – especially in relation to the program outcomes and objectives of the Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF). As a frame of reference for interpreting these in the context of the Australia Awards MEF, it is important to note that in addition to the broad Goal, and the Program and Intermediate Outcomes (detailed in Figure 1), several Australia Awards Performance Targets were also considered closely in this case study due to their direct relevance to engaging with civil society. The targets of relevance in these analyses include:

- Inclusion (MEF target 2);
- Influencing Development (target 3);
- Alumni Network (target 4);
- Bilateral Collaboration (target 5); and
- Women’s Leadership (target 6).

Data analysed in this report was based on the GTF’s Global Tracer Survey, carried out in November and December of 2020.² The analysis focus for this dataset was on alumni who had indicated that they hold a leadership role in their community. Quantitative analyses in this report are based on this group of alumni.

Eight in-depth interviews were completed with a selected group of alumni who have a leadership role within their community. Alumni for interviews were identified through responses to the Global Tracer Survey and recommendations from Australia Awards managing contractors, and Australian High Commissions. The selection of alumni invited to participate in interviews was based on ensuring a wide range of types of contribution and a variety of countries spanning the Pacific and South-East Asia (further detail in section 3 of this report and see Annex 1 and 2 for detail on participants and the interview guide used).

For this case study, the GTF has explored the civil society contributions of scholarship and fellowship alumni through the lens of volunteerism. The GTF uses six broad activities, identified by the UNV (2015) to demonstrate the different ways alumni contribute to civil society. The icons presented below, represent the broad ways that volunteering can contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and build more equitable and inclusive communities.

2 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/australia-awards/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility-year-5-results/australia-awards-alumni-global-tracer-survey-2020>

How volunteerism can contribute to achieving the UN SDGs (UNV, 2015)

Raising awareness

of development challenges and inequalities at the grassroots level.



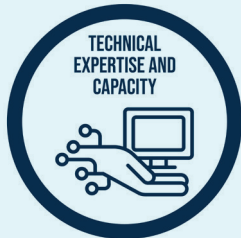
Mobilising people

to take ownership of development challenges within their own communities and leveraging collective action to make positive change (the ripple effect-micro, macro, meso).



Providing technical expertise and capacity

across the different thematic goals such as health, education, gender, sustainability, and the environment.



Brokering engagement with government

agencies to build partnerships for change.



Transforming societal attitudes and behaviours

through advocating in areas such as gender equality, disability and social inclusion, climate change and poverty.



Collecting data

to assess and monitor progress and mobilise collective action and technical assistance when needed to address development challenges.



2. Alumni Contributions to Civil Society

2.1 Overview

In exploring alumni contributions to civil society, this report draws on two main data sources. The GTF Global Tracer Survey, was conducted in 2020 and gathered responses from more than 6,200 alumni in more than 100 countries worldwide; and in-depth interviews with eight alumni who are contributing to their community in various ways and through a range of approaches. The combination of ‘big picture’, global data and the ‘fine-grain’ insight from specific alumni provides the ability to examine the scale of contributions by alumni to civil society, understand the motivations, and provide stories to illustrate these contributions.

The contributions highlighted in this report help in furthering understanding of the way in which the Australia Awards is achieving Program Outcome 1: *Alumni use their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development*. The insight here is different from other reports of the GTF and other research exploring long-term outcomes of alumni who volunteer because of its focus on contributions outside of formal work. This chapter begins by exploring the contributions of alumni using the survey data to provide a global snapshot; it then focuses on the individual stories of alumni interviewed for this study.

2.2 Global snapshot

The GTF’s 2020 Global Tracer Survey, 2020 provides high-level evidence of the contribution of alumni to their communities. As part of a wide-ranging questionnaire, the survey asked alumni whether they have a leadership position within their community, and what that role is. These questions are asked alongside questions about leadership within the workplace, so the ‘community leadership’ items are intended to build an understanding of the kind of contributions that alumni are leading outside of their formal/paid work. While these questions do not capture the full extent of volunteerism and non-paid contributions to development by alumni, they do provide a strong indication of the commitments alumni are making outside their work in civil society.

About a quarter (27%) of all alumni who responded to the GTF Global Tracer Survey in 2020 indicated that they have a leadership role within their community. Male alumni were slightly more likely to indicate they have a community leadership role, although this difference was not substantial (29% compared with 23% of women). When examined by the type of organisations alumni are employed in, those working in the university sector (30%) were most likely to have a community leadership position, with those working in private sector (23%) or multilateral organisations (20%) the least likely.

One area where differences in community leadership patterns were evident is when explored by geographic region. As Figure 2 shows, alumni from Papua New Guinea, Pacific Island countries and Sub-Saharan Africa were significantly more likely than those from other areas to occupy a leadership role in their community, with about half of all alumni from these three regions in these positions.

The survey asked alumni who were in community leadership roles to detail the ‘title’ of their role and based on this qualitative insight, Figure 3 shows the variety of leadership contributions alumni are making in their communities. Contributions through faith-based roles, involvement in peak body organisations and educational roles are most common among this group. However, the figure also shows there are a wide range of leadership roles in community occupied by alumni of the Australia Awards.

Figure 2: Alumni who have a community leadership role, by region (n=5242). Source: GTF Australia Awards Global Tracer Survey 2020

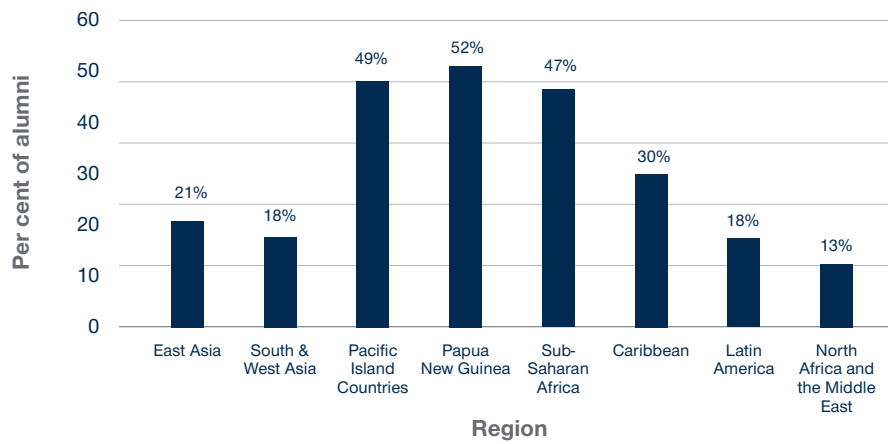
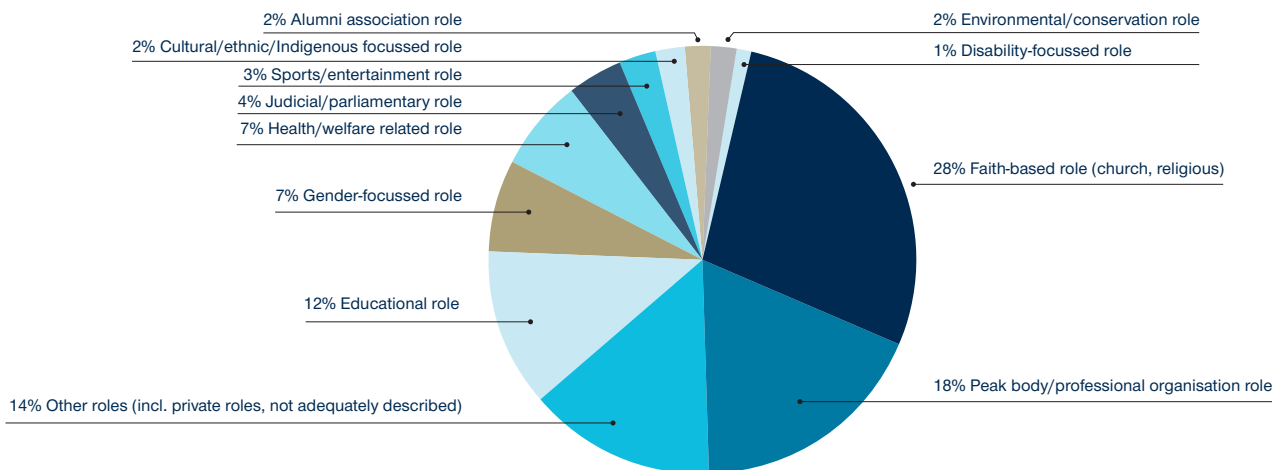


Figure 3: Types of roles held by alumni in community leadership positions (n=1038). Source: GTF Australia Awards Global Tracer Survey 2020



2.3 In-depth examination of alumni contributions to civil society

The data from the 2020 Global Tracer Survey provides a useful reference point for beginning to more closely explore the role of alumni in contributions to civil society and their communities. To build a more nuanced understanding, a selection of alumni based on the top five areas of community leadership were chosen for in-depth interviews. These alumni covered activities in religious or faith-based organisations, health and welfare, education, peak bodies and professional organisations and gender. Selection of interview participants was also undertaken in order to represent the gender and region of Australia Awards alumni as closely as possible. Consideration was also given to ensuring that a broad range of different contributions and experiences was captured – with a focus on a range of different types of volunteerism, and contributions to different areas of community and SDGs.

Interviews were conducted with selected alumni through online video platforms, with alumni asked a series of questions to understand their background, their experience on award, their life post-award and most importantly the way in which they are contributing to civil society. The following pages document examples from these alumni, focusing on the how they use their time outside of paid work to contribute to civil society.

Advocating for adult learning and education to support sustainable development



Dr Guevara at the UN Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2019.
Photo: Dr Guevara

Dr Jose Roberto Guevara (Robbie), Philippines

John Crawford Scholarship: **Civil society contributions:**

Masters Environmental Science, Monash University, 1994–1996

Employed as an Associate Professor in International Development at RMIT University, Melbourne

President of the International Council for Adult Education, Board member of the Global Campaign for Education, LGBTIQA+ and lifelong learning advocate.

Dr Jose Roberto ‘Robbie’ Guevara is an Associate Professor in International Development at RMIT University, and an active advocate of adult learning and education (ALE). He is the current President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), and a Board Member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) representing Asia-Pacific. In 2012, Dr Guevara was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame for his contributions to adult learning in the Asia-Pacific region.

As the President of ICAE, Dr Guevara facilitated the active engagement of civil society in the development of the Marrakesh Framework for Action (MFA), as part of the UNESCO’s 7th International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) in Morocco in June 2022. The MFA advocates for global funding and recognition of ALE as a ‘fundamental human right’ of adults and young people, and vital in combating global social, political, and environmental challenges. The MFA advocates ALE inclusion in global education policy frameworks and promotes ALE as essential in building ‘citizenship’ and ownership of development problems at the grassroots level. It focuses on ALE’s role in contributing to the achievement of the UN SDGs (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022)

Dr Guevara’s ALE advocacy, dates back to the early 1990’s, before he studied in Australia. Through his involvement in the Asia-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), the regional network of adult educators in civil society, he developed life-changing, professional linkages with two Australian academics. Professor Shirley Randall, then Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Adult Education (CAE), opened the opportunity to link his Master’s research project with a Certificate in Community Tourism that was being developed by the CAE. Dr Helen Hill, from Victoria University, whom he also met through this network, would go on to supervise his PhD. These connections have been pivotal throughout his academic career and advocacy work.

After receiving a John Crawford scholarship to study a Master of Environmental Science at Monash University in 1994, Dr Guevara began volunteering at the CAE and the Victorian AIDS Council. He used his teaching expertise and knowledge of ALE principles to develop several workshops. Most notably, he designed a peer mentoring, ‘train the trainer’ program called Gay Asian Proud (GAP) to build AIDS awareness among men of Asian heritage. In recognition of his contribution to AIDS awareness and Gay rights, Dr Guevara received a Gay and Lesbian Community Award from the Victorian AIDS Council and the Gay Men’s Health Centre in 1999.

Dr Guevara remains actively engaged in ALE advocacy and advocates for ‘ALE visibility in global lifelong learning and education policy frameworks’. He notes his work at RMIT University provides him with the ‘unique opportunity to weave together his teaching, research and engagement that focuses on SDG 4.7, education for sustainability and active global citizenship’.



Dr Guevara speaking on behalf of ICAE at a Civil Society Forum.
Photo: Dr Guevara

Supporting rural education to break the poverty cycle



Mr Sinthay Neb, Cambodia

Australia Awards Fellowship:

'Sector Wide Approach to the Implementation of Rights-Based Inclusive Development in Cambodia', Queensland University of Technology, 2014

Employed as a Deputy Team Leader at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Cambodia

Civil society contributions:

Donor – founder and chairman of Sangkheum Kumar Kampuchea (SKK) which supports education for underprivileged rural children in his local village

Mr Sinthay Neb's career has seen him work across the development sector in Cambodia, in areas such as peace building and disarmament, policy and advocacy in non-government organisations (NGOs), and inclusive education and training. A vocal advocate of the power of education to transform lives, Mr Neb volunteers his time to support children and young people in his village to pursue education to help break the poverty cycle.

Identifying needs in his village back in 2012, Mr Neb and a colleague from Belgium established the registered, grassroots charity – Sangkheum Kumar Kampuchea (SKK) – "The Hope of the Children". The purpose of the charity is 'to promote rural education and support poor students to access education.' The charity works closely with local schools in the village to improve retention and encourage parents to see the benefits of educating their children. SKK works directly with 'the local teachers and supports the school committees' to provide teaching materials, yearly uniforms, classroom resources, professional development training, planning support and funding for visiting English language teachers.

Mr Neb, works closely with a broad range of community stakeholders, ensuring their ownership of SKK's activities and to build long-term sustainability of the investment in the community. He notes that one of the key skills he learnt during his fellowship was 'to work with the community, welcome

different people, different opinions' as part of planning and capacity building activities, to ensure stakeholders know how the charity will benefit the village as a whole. Mr Neb engages with village leaders, parents and community groups 'to show them that education can break the poverty cycle.' He often shares his story to inspire others to see that education can transform lives, and change attitudes towards school completion among the students and villagers.

'We use some of the examples like myself, as a role model, because I was a poor student, a poor child in that village. I had no parents at 9 or 10 years old but I struggled to find a way to become educated, and then I went to university, I have got a job, I have money and a family.'

The Belgium arm of the charity has supported the construction of new school buildings, a guest house for visitors, and supported costs associated with a visiting Belgian teacher through sponsorship from the Miss Belgium beauty pageant. It has also developed a yearly student exchange program where Belgian high school students live at the village as part of a cultural exchange program. Mr Neb stated that he is 'very proud' of SKK's work. It has been 'highly influential' on the village students, giving them insight into life 'outside the village' and has led to an increasing number of students completing school, and going on to further study or improved employment outcomes outside the village.



Mr Neb and Miss Belgium with village school children. Mr Neb providing uniforms to school children as part of his charity work. Photos: Mr Neb

Grassroots waste management transforming the heart of Hanoi



Ms Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong, Vietnam

Australian Development Scholarship: Master of Science (Meteorology) from Monash University 2000–2001

Retired (2014) former Consultant on IT and hydrometeorology at Minh Viet IT Company

Civil society contributions:

Environmental volunteer and advocate – ‘Ninomya’ – Hanoi City’s Lake

In 2012, Ms Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong joined a local environment collective facilitated by Japanese expatriates living in Hanoi. The citizen led group- ‘Lam Sach Dep Ho Guom Voi Ninomya’ began cleaning up rubbish around the 12-hectare Hoan Kien Lake (the Lake of the Returned Sword) in the centre of busy Hanoi in response to a public waste management problem.

A retired scientist and climate consultant, Ms Nguyen has been an active member of this grassroots collective for over 10 years. She has helped to transform the park’s waste problem, through a targeted weekly clean-up campaign, petitioning the local council to install additional rubbish bins, and educating others about environmental protection and waste management. Ms Nguyen uses social media to raise awareness and recruit volunteers to help clean-up the park weekly.

Each Sunday, the group meets at the lake, Ms Nguyen and other core members distribute clean-up kits and help volunteers sort through and recycle the rubbish collected. She helps to teach participants about the importance of recycling and the ‘circular economy’, ensuring that waste can be reused. As a ‘collective or working group,’ the numbers of volunteers vary each week, with participants coming from all walks of life to help.

‘The most valuable of our voluntary work is to raise public awareness on clean environment protection so people can live happily and healthily together. And we can bring back recycling to the economy to set up natural businesses... recycling paper, so we have less need to cut trees and cut the forests down.’

The collective has received much positive press over the years, which has helped to generate interest in volunteering and changes in public attitudes towards litter and the use of green, urban spaces. Ms Nguyen noted, ‘Many people saw us on TV, and so they feel happy to participate, to work, to clean up the environment. So, we say to them, “This is to show love to our capital Hanoi, to love our environment, our home and children.”’

Ms Nguyen believes that the environment, health, and wellbeing are interlinked. She reflected that her volunteering ‘is very simple work, but it has lots of meanings to people, to our lives. If you don’t keep the environment clean, we don’t have a happy life, we don’t have a healthy life.’



Clean-up resources set out for volunteers. Photos: Ms Nguyen



Inspiring Samoan girls to consider IT careers



Ms Tagiilima Neemia, Samoa

Australia Awards Scholarship: *Employed as the Principal PC/Network Officer, Ministry of Finance, Samoa*
Master of Cyber Security, RMIT, 2018–2019

Employed as a Deputy Team Leader at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Cambodia

Civil society contributions:
Co-Founder Geek Girl Academy Samoa; digital security advocate

As the first female cyber security expert in Samoa, Ms Tagiilima Neemia has been using her skills, knowledge and networks developed on award and through the Australia Awards Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI)³, to support female participation in information technology (IT) in Samoa.

While on award, Ms Neemia connected with women leaders in the Australian IT sector through her WLI mentor Megan Hass, who introduced her to the co-founder of the Geek Girl Academy, Sarah Moran. This led to establishing of a Geek Girl Academy in Samoa in early 2020 as part of a WLI project to engage six to 12-year-old girls in coding workshops to increase interest in STEM-based (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) careers. The workshops were run free for girls and female relatives, to help break down gender stereotypes around IT and promote STEM based careers to Samoan girls.

‘The focus for me was just girls and women, because I saw that in Samoa a lot of the IT’s are male... I just wanted something to start to get the girls interested to pursue IT... so that if they’re interested, they can pursue something along the path of technology. At the time when I started pursuing a degree in IT there were not a lot [of women in IT] in Samoa.’

Although, put on hold due to the pandemic, Ms Neemia continues to work with Geek Girl Academy in Australia in the hope of running online classes for girls in the future. They are working with partners to find funding to set up safe, reliable internet to run an online version of the program in Samoa, where community interest remains high.

In 2020, Ms Neemia also volunteered with the WLI Leadership for COVID-19 Response and Recovery Program, which bought together WLI alumni to support development leadership in their communities. Ms Neemia led and collaborated with three WLI alumni to deliver cyber safety and security workshops for families in rural communities.

‘I was basically talking about Internet safety. I was telling them some basic tips on how to be safe on the Internet and what to look out for. And the interest from the parents in the rural areas was just amazing.’

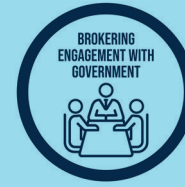
Ms Neemia’s motivation and commitment to changing attitudes and building the capacity of her local community, is clear: ‘My country has a lot of catching up to do in regards to technology...I believe with stronger leadership, technology can be used to improve the way of life and also the career avenues of women in my country and community.’ Australia Global Alumni, 2019)



Ms Neemia and participants from the first Samoan Geek Girl Academy. Photo: Vaitogi Asuisui Matafeo of the Samoa Observer.

3 WLI is now known as the Women Leading and Influencing. <https://wliiprogram.org/>

Campaigning for right-based disability inclusion



Mr del Rio accepting his Master of Management Technology in 2003 from the University of La Salle in Lipa, Batangas

Mr Ronnel del Rio, Philippines

Australia Awards Fellowship: **Civil society contributions:**

'Empowering Leaders to Develop a Disability-Inclusive Vocational Education Framework in the Philippines'; Charlton Brown (Brisbane), 2015

Employed as the Housing and Home site Affairs Officer, Provincial Government of Batangas

Disability advocate; a member of the Philippine Coalition on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the President of the Philippine Chamber of Massage Industry of Visually Impaired.

For more than 40 years, Mr Ronnel del Rio has volunteered his time as a disability advocate, campaigning for a rights-based approaches to disability inclusion, focusing on education and employment. He was the first visually impaired Filipino to complete a master's degree in the Philippines in 2003 and is well-known for his work as a radio broadcaster, public servant and disability advocate, helping to raise awareness of the lived experiences of people with disabilities in the Philippines. In 2012, he participated in the drafting of the Incheon Strategy, to 'Make the Right Real' for persons with disabilities and worked closely with the United Nations to help the Philippine Government realise the strategy.

While at university, Mr del Rio worked part time as a massage therapist and formed the Philippine Chamber of Massage Industry of Visually Impaired in 2012. This led to advocacy work to improve access to inclusive learning materials for the visually impaired as part of their training. In 2015, Mr del Rio undertook an Australia Awards fellowship, 'Empowering Leaders to Develop a Disability-Inclusive Vocational Education Framework in the Philippines'. He returned to the Philippines to use this knowledge to broker change between the government and training providers to establish inclusive vocational training for visually impaired massage therapists.

'After coming back from that fellowship, I had a big involvement. [The government] were reframing or reorganising the courses offered for massage, and I was able to [advocate] that the government should put more priorities when a person who is blind wants to learn massage properly. So, I've introduced audio materials and a proper way of giving tests to a trainee.'

This has reduced discrimination and training costs faced by visually impaired trainees and strengthened their professional competencies. The Chamber has also established massage clinics in malls and airports and empowered its members to run their own businesses. Mr del Rio noted, as the

'President of the Philippine Chamber of Massage Industry of the Visually Impaired, I have 5,000 members who are blind massage therapist. During the pandemic, at least 70 per cent of our members survived... Now, they're slowly getting back on their feet... And that's because of discipline perhaps, because of some seeds that we have planted for them during the pandemic time. And part of it is the learnings that I've had in Australia, which I transferred to them during our training courses.'

Mr del Rio is returning to Australia in 2022 to undertake an Australia Awards scholarship to study a Master of Social Entrepreneurship. He plans to develop a manual to provide 'Filipinos with disabilities an economic empowerment access program' as part of his re-entry action plan.



The 10 goals of the Incheon Strategy. ESCAP, 2012



Using ‘Alumni of the Year’ prize money to build a business to employ women in need



Ms Endang Soares da Silva, Timor-Leste

Australia Awards Scholarship: Civil society contributions:

Master of Laboratory Medicine from RMIT University, 2016–2018

Employed as the Executive Director of Timor-Leste’s National Health Laboratory

Sponsor of a women’s empowerment initiative with Red Feto (the Women’s Network of Timor-Leste); volunteer and host in the medical sector.

Ms Endang Soares da Silva has been an active volunteer since graduating high school. In 2004, she spent a gap year working at the Bairo Pite Clinic, which provides free health care to unprivileged Timorese. This role led to work as a lab assistant at the clinic, a scholarship from the Faculty of Science at Queensland University of Technology (2006 to 2010), and a career in medical science.

Now the Executive Director of the National Health Laboratory, Ms Soares da Silva provides opportunities for new graduates to volunteer in her organisation and recently hosted a former classmate from the Master of Laboratory Medicine at RMIT University.

‘I invited some of my friends who hadn’t had the opportunity to work in the lab. I said, “If you are looking for work experience, I am the head of the lab. You are welcome to come and just provide a letter that you are interested to come to work voluntarily with us.”’

The pandemic was a busy time for Ms Soares da Silva, who managed the National Laboratory response and the establishment of in-country COVID-19 testing. Her remarkable work saw her receive the 2021 Timor-Leste Alumni of the Year Award.

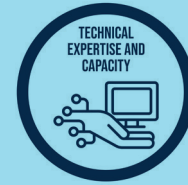
The economic downturn caused by the pandemic adversely affected many Timorese women who were unable to find work to support their families. Looking for ways to help, Ms Soares da Silva decided to volunteer with the Women’s Network of Timor-Leste, Rede Feto, and use the prize money from her Alumni of the Year Award to provide seed funding to set up a social enterprise to provide employment and training for women from single parent households.

‘[I thought, with] \$3,000, maybe I can open a small shop. Maybe this shop can provide them an income, so they can use this income to provide food for their kids or pay for school fees or buy toys.’

The shop opened in March 2022 and employs four women recommended by Rede Feto. The staff are responsible for managing the food preparation, selling food, paying the bills, and drawing a wage for themselves each month. Over the last six months, the shop has become popular with staff from Dili’s National Hospital, and these customers are now able to phone in and get healthy fast food delivered. Ms Soares da Silva continues to mentor staff and hopes that the shop will empower the women to break out of poverty cycle and build better lives for themselves and their children.



Group photo of Ms Soares da Silva and three of the employees in their uniforms. Photo: Ms Soares da Silva



Strengthen community connections through technology



Ms Shannon Coalala Toutou, Fiji

Australia Development Scholarship
Masters Human Resources Management, Curtin University, 2000–2002

Employed as the Employment Relations Tribunal Member for the Judicial Department, Fiji.

Civil society contributions:

Communication Director and leader of the Ambassador club within the Seventh-day Adventists Ministry, Fiji

Ms Shannon Coalala Toutou is an active member of her local Seventh-day Adventists Ministry. She regularly contributes to her local community by providing specialised technical skills and knowledge from her human resources background to lead the church’s communication team and coordinate a tailored youth engagement program.

Over the last few years, Ms Toutou has taken on the role of Communications Director for her church and is responsible for broadcasting accessible church programs online to members unable to attend or living abroad. The team uses Zoom or Facebook Live to run interactive programs for church members. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Communications Department played a major role in keeping the community connected.

‘We put up our Zoom link, so that when we were having the lockdown, everybody was given a task to do, so that when we linked up, the number of programs that we run in our church are run during Zoom. So, nobody missed out. So that was helpful. We put it up on our Facebook page, so that other members who are either unable to make it to Suva, for instance, or those who are in Australia or America, they’re also able to watch. It’s helpful that we had started this before COVID.’

In response to a lack of tailored opportunities in her church for young people aged 16 to 21, Ms Toutou set up a Seventh-day Adventists Ambassadors Club to provide youth in her community with age-appropriate activities and support. The youth group takes members on camps, where they learn valuable life and social skills such as cooking, communication, and team building.

‘We go camping, and we set up programs for the camp. These club members cook their own food. I would give them packs to run a morning devotion, an evening devotion, and we would have programs on being a team member, team leader, looking at how teams work, how they can become an effective team member. This is something I’m applying from HR into this program.’

Ms Toutou works closely with local community organisations such as disability support services and aged care facilities to provide community outreach programs as part of the Ambassadors Club. The group also works closely with children experiencing homelessness by providing meals. Although COVID-19 has impacted the group’s outreach work, she is hopeful that the Ambassadors Club is helping to meet the needs of young people in her community.

‘We do a lot of community work...We try to run programs for these young people so that they can stay in the church and do work, rather than be involved in drugs...’



Ms Shannon Toutou and members of the Ambassadors Club camping in rural Fiji.



‘Paying it forward’ through individual and collective action

Alum A⁴, Vietnam

Australian Development

Scholarship: Master of Applied Linguistics, University of Melbourne, 2000s

Currently employed in the education and training sector in Vietnam

Civil society contributions:

Donor; volunteer in the education and training sector

Since returning from award, Alum A has been actively involved in the education sector in Vietnam, holding several senior roles in their field of expertise. They remain connected with their Australia Awards cohort from the early 2000s and have been involved in a range of alumni activities. Through friends from this network, Alum A became involved in donating to an important local foundation which provides meals to cancer patients in hospital and scholarships for their children.

For Alum A, there is a strong motivation to share the benefits of their scholarship with others through ‘paying it forward’. They have privately sponsored five vulnerable students in their community to complete their education and step out of the poverty cycle. They noted, ‘I’m very proud of the fact that I have helped others. Five children of very difficult circumstances have become solid, decent, responsible people’.

An active volunteer, Alum A has also shared their education expertise in community-based education initiatives such as the Books are Bridges project. This project builds libraries for underprivileged schools and children’s hospitals. They have also been involved in grassroots initiatives such as training local preschool teachers to provide traffic safety education, to reduce traffic accidents involving children in their local neighbourhood.

Alum A actively uses their networks and expertise to support education initiatives for vulnerable groups. Through individual and collective action, Alum A is making a difference to the education outcomes of others within their community.

⁴ Alum A has been de-identified to protect their privacy. The GTF have removed bio data relating to their award, gender and employment to protect their identity.

3. Motivations and the Role of Australia Awards in Fostering Civil Society Contributions

3.1 Introduction

The Australia Awards help develop leaders who, as alumni, make significant contributions to their country, work sectors and communities. As noted earlier in this report, most of the focus on the role of Australia Awards in building leaders and development contributions has been on workplace and occupational-based outcomes. The chapter above demonstrated that alumni also contribute to their communities and beyond through volunteerism and other activities that are not part of their paid work.

This section explores the motivations and the extent to which the Australia Awards played a specific role in helping the alumni interviewed to make the contributions described in their snapshots above. The interviews revealed a strong sense of ‘giving back’ that was motivating alumni to contribute on return from award. There were also consistent references by alumni to the role that their Australia Awards experience, the knowledge and skills gained in Australia, and the networks developed as part of the award have been important factors influencing and encouraging them to make positive contributions to civil society.

It is important to note, many alumni were already volunteering before their award. For some alumni, their active participation in civil society has always been embedded in their personal beliefs. In fact, the Australia Awards selection criteria and marketing focus on those committed to giving back to their communities and contributing to their country. The discussion below is based on this understanding, with the second section specifically seeking to explore how the Australia Awards built on – and built up – a desire to contribute.

3.2 Motivating factors for contributions

An overwhelming message from the alumni interviewed for this study was that as recipients of a scholarship, they felt a strong desire to ‘give back’ to their community on return from award. This element was a consistent theme identified by all alumni interviewed and exemplified in the discussion below. Alumni also developed other motivations based on their experiences on award, including a desire to build educational capacity in their home country and a motivation to use newfound experiences to advocate for the rights of disadvantaged groups.

3.2.1 Giving back/paying it forward

All alumni involved in the interviews for this case study indicated that a crucial motivation for them to be involved in the programs and projects they are contributing to in civil society was that they wanted to give back. The overwhelming feeling among this group was that they wanted to ensure that the benefits they received through scholarships and other opportunities were shared as widely and as effectively as possible.

Specific to this sentiment, Alum A highlighted their feeling of obligation to their community: ‘it was our responsibility to pay forward’. Ms Neemia similarly noted, ‘I just want to do something just to boost, or point them or guide kids in the Pacific, in the direction that I went’. Other alumni highlighted similar motivations, based on recognition of their opportunities and their interest in ensuring that their community can benefit from this through their involvement in projects and contributions to civil society.

All alumni interviewed were either ‘giving back’ in ways related to their scholarship or helping others in their communities and recognised the role that they could play in improving opportunities. Two illustrative examples of this are the highlighted in the words of Mr Neb and Mr del Rio. Mr Neb noted, ‘since I have now had a chance to study, I think education is very important to break the cycle of poverty in rural villages.’ Mr del Rio also stated, ‘there are only a few of us Filipinos with disabilities who happened to go to school. And of course, as our way of paying back to our sector, we are involving ourselves in policy formulation, in the drafting of human rights programs and services.’ Further examples of these contributions are outlined in the biographical section and in the sections below.

3.2.2 Building capacity and improving education

All alumni interviewed for this project are building capacity in some form or another. However, four alumni are specifically focussing on capacity building in their contributions to civil society – and noted that building up others through education and learning was the guiding motivation for their volunteerism and similar activities outside of their paid work.

Dr Guevara’s focus is on adult education and lifelong learning. He recognises the power of learning across the lifespan in raising opportunities for all people – and is motivated to contribute on this basis. In discussing this motivation, Dr Guevara mentioned his belief in ‘the transformative power of adult learning and education’ as a means of developing ‘a socially cohesive, fulfilling, inclusive and sustainable future for all’. His work in the International Council of Adult Education is critical to achieving this goal globally.

At a more local level, Mr Neb’s contributions have transformed opportunities for education in the village where he grew up. His commitment following his study has been to devote his time outside of paid work to developing educational opportunities within this village. Attracting funding for infrastructure and resources from sources across the globe, he has been able to alleviate some of the challenges that he saw growing up, and now ‘that village is very lucky if you compare it to the other villages in that district. We have a school. We also have support.’

Ms Neemia spoke about how the importance of education and learning was instilled in her by her parents, and now she has the opportunity to share her knowledge right across Samoa to improve digital literacy. One of her voluntary contributions has involved helping facilitate workshops across rural Samoa with fellow alumnae from the Australia Awards Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI), a selective supplementary leadership program to the Australia Awards. In these workshops, Ms Neemia speaks with communities about cyber security. She provides in-person assistance to help young people and their parents navigate the digital world more safely and responsibly: ‘We can keep saying to them, “It’s on the website. You should look at this”, but to be actually standing there and to show them how it’s done, that’s different.’

Through her contributions within her church, Ms Toutou is also boosting the capabilities of young people in using technology. Motivated by her belief that ‘I have these skills that I could offer’, Ms Toutou is mentoring young people within the church to improve their technical expertise and become future leaders. In particular, she is currently mentoring a young man in the church with the intention of passing on to him the important role of Communications Director, which includes helping to run the church television and radio programs in Fiji.



Mr Neb and village children outside donated school buildings holding new education packs. Photo: Mr Neb



Geek Girl founder Sarah Moran, with Geek Girl Samoa's Co-founders, Tagiilima Neemia and Maena Faatuuala-Ah Leong. Samoa Observer, 12 January 2020. Photo Vaitogi Asuisui Matafeo, Samoa Observer

3.2.3 Advocacy

Advocacy-based motivations drive many of the civil society contributions made by the alumni interviewed. Alumni are using their positions, skills, knowledge and networks to advocate for specific causes they see as important and to empower communities experiencing disadvantage. The examples below show how these alumni are motivated to empower women and girls, build awareness of environmental issues, advocate for people with disability, and raise awareness of and funding to support adult education.

Many of the alumnae interviewed in this case study are working to **empower women**, and the examples of Ms Soares da Silva and Ms Neemia are exemplary. As highlighted in her biographical snapshot earlier, Ms Soares da Silva used the money she received from her Alumni of the Year award to fund a take-away shop that employs and provides new skills to women. She is motivated by the knowledge that empowering women through paid work enables them a chance to direct their futures:

Yes, my motivation was to support these women. I call them vulnerable women. By themselves they have no job, they have no skill, so they really need support – I encourage them. I say, “With this shop, maybe you can get some income and then maybe you want to pursue study.”...I’m proud because I can see that now they have the activity, they come to work. Women shouldn’t just stay at home. Working is one part of how you develop yourself and then also you can teach other people.... With this shop, it is just a start. Maybe after that, you can save money, you have a better job and then you can also continue to contribute to the community.

Ms Neemia has been a trailblazer as a woman in cyber security, and she is motivated to ensure other Samoan girls are supported to pursue this area. By bringing Geek Girl Academy to Samoa, Ms Neemia has a means to build motivation in girls, ‘for me, I just wanted something to start to get the girls interested to pursue IT. Just to initiate, so that if they’re interested, they can pursue something along the path of technology. At the time when I started pursuing a degree in IT there were not a lot in Samoa. That’s why the focus was on girls.’

Mr del Rio has **advocated for people with disability** for most of his life. His experience on award and networks with Australians furthered his passion for advocacy and gave him examples of practice he could pursue at home in the Philippines. His motivation to advocate comes also from an awareness that he has the skills and abilities to make a difference. Mr del Rio highlighted this in his interview, noting:

There are only a few of us Filipinos with disabilities who happened to go to school. And of course, as our way of paying back to our sector, we are involving ourselves in policy formulation, in the drafting of human rights programs and services...and hopefully many government officials will listen and open more doors for better services for our next generation of Filipinos with disability.



Mr Ronnel del Rio and other disability activists launching the Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2013 –2022, as part of the Incheon Strategy, South Korea, 2012. Photo Mr del Rio

For Ms Phuong, her actions as she helps clean up her local park with fellow volunteers contribute directly to **advocacy for the environment** by building awareness of the impact of litter and waste on parks and waterways. As Ms Phuong highlighted in her interview, 'the consequence of economic development is rubbish everywhere...The most value of our voluntary work is to raise public awareness on environment protection so that people can live happily and healthily together.' Through her decade-long involvement in cleaning up her local park, Ms Phuong has been involved in television and radio campaigns, and helped other cities establish similar grass-roots programs to 'make a contribution to cleaning up the environment.'



Collective action, volunteers sorting through waste August 2022. Photo: Ms Phuong Nguyen, Facebook post.

After many years in adult education, Dr Guevara now sees his contribution as being all about advocacy, 'much of my work now has really been in **advocacy work for the role that civil society plays in adult education** at the global level, the kind of work that we do with civil society in adult education.' The motivation for advocacy has come through the messages Dr Guevara hears from those on the frontline, teaching:

They said, "Yes, we can have the best training programs, but if people don't have access to these training programs, there's no funding for these training programs, then this doesn't happen."...So, now I do a lot of global and regional advocacy work.

3.3 How Australia Awards have helped alumni contribute to civil society

Many factors coalesce to equip people with the tools, confidence and motivations to contribute to their community. Some of the alumni interviewed were involved in civil society and volunteerism before their scholarship or fellowship. However, this research is particularly interested in the extent the Australia Awards has influenced alumni's motivation and equipped them to help in civil society following their award. This section of the report explores the specific instances where alumni have identified how their award has contributed or motivated them to make a difference in their communities. This analysis identifies links to alumni achievements in civil society that can be attributed to their Australia Awards opportunity.

3.3.1 Changing attitudes and perceptions

As highlighted in previous research by the GTF, alumni often refer to their experience of living and studying in Australia as transformational. This sentiment is consistent regardless of the region of the world an alum comes from, the university they studied at or the qualification they undertook. Amongst the alumni interviewed in this case study, they highlighted their experience in Australia as significant in changing their attitudes, perceptions, and often, approaches to life, work and, importantly, motivations to contribute to civil society. Mr del Rio, Ms Toutou, Alum A, Ms Neemia, Dr Guevara specifically highlighted the role of their award in changing perceptions and attitudes, and this has shaped their lives post award. Examples from Alum A and Ms Neemia illustrate this impact of the awards.

Alum A's interview particularly highlighted the contribution of their award to their mindset on return from award:

It was not only the skills [I gained in Australia]. It was another perspective to my own self and to life...I learned from the scholarships, because I saw that you guys, using taxpayers' money, to give us an education, it was our responsibility to pay forward.

Working closely with vulnerable students in their community, Alum A has subsequently sponsored and mentored 'five children of very difficult circumstances' throughout their education and youth.

Similarly, Ms Neemia specifically pinpointed the experience of her Australia Award as changing her approach to life on her return to Samoa. Her example also highlights how this experience specifically led to her motivation to contribute beyond paid work and to other parts of her community:

It's something that I'm very proud of. Before my journey to Australia, I was just focused on work. I didn't have this drive to look beyond. It was just my family and work, that was it for me. And then, coming to Australia and seeing things happening there and a lot of opportunities there, I came back feeling that there's just a lot of things that are lacking here. I just wish that everyone that comes back can give back to the community.

3.3.2 Expanded networks

Developing connections and networks between alumni and Australia is a core program outcome of the Australia Awards. For some of the alumni interviewed, the networks they forged as part of their award have been pivotal in facilitating their contributions to civil society in the years following their award.

For example, Ms Soares da Silva remains connected to the Australian High Commission in Timor-Leste. Because of her work contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic in Timor-Leste, the High Commission awarded Ms Soares da Silva Alumni of the Year 2021. The prize from that award funded the shop that Ms Soares da Silva opened to support women with employment and new skills. Ms Soares da Silva noted in her interview that the recognition by the Australian High Commission and the funding it provided were specific catalysts for her interest in pursuing voluntary work.

Dr Guevara's links with Australia remain very close. However, nearly three decades since his award, he highlights the connections he made during his scholarship as significant in the contributions he makes to civil society:

[It was] the Council for Adult Education that gave me the grounding to see how my community education work can be called adult education, because we don't use "adult education" in the Philippines. The whole terminology and the whole of that experience and theory of adult learning and adult education came out from that link.

A more recent alumni of the Australia Awards, Ms Neemia, has also utilised her networks to help facilitate her contributions to the Samoan community. As part of her award, Ms Neemia was selected to the Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI), where networking and mentoring are a substantial focus. Ms Neemia highlighted:

A lot of things happened for me with this leadership program, not only as a leader, but it also helped me with networks. Through this, I was able to connect with people with similar interests. This led me to Girl Geek Academy.

She also connected with Samoan alumnae through her WLI networks. This has led to her involvement in workshops with a group of alumnae visiting villages across Samoa sharing their knowledge and skills. Together, they have developed a workshop with five different sessions covering a range of topics, including Ms Neemia's contribution on cyber safety.

Furthermore, Alum A's network with fellow Australia Awards alumni led directly to the charities and philanthropic opportunities that have resulted in their sponsorship of disadvantaged young people. Mr del Rio's time in Australia helped link him with Vision Australia and continues to exchange ways to empower the visually impaired community in Australia and the Philippines.

3.3.3 Knowledge and skills gained on award

It is common to be able to link the skills and knowledge from a scholarship to the ongoing contributions alumni make through their paid work – many of the case studies of the GTF highlight this strongly. Regarding contributions outside of paid work, it was anticipated that the role of the knowledge and skill content of the Australia Awards might be more tenuous. However, most alumni interviewed in this case study made direct references and links to the content of their courses and their abilities to make a difference in their contributions to civil society.

For example, Dr Guevara's experience during his master's degree at Monash University was important in providing him an 'interdisciplinary perspective', giving him the confidence to pursue his ideas and contributions to adult education without compromising his other expertise.

I did more integrated studies and all that, and that gave me the confidence to say that I'm not losing my science. So, I think that has been the main thing for me, what my studies at Monash have contributed to who I am today.

Mr Neb was keen to highlight the impact the skills he developed in his fellowship have had on the way he has worked with the village he is supporting in developing education infrastructure:

The knowledge that I gained from the fellowship, there are at least a couple of areas that I utilise it. For example, when we started to work with the community, we had to think about broader stakeholders and we also welcomed different people, different opinions. When we were doing the fellowship, we were also talking about the roles of the different stakeholders in the community. Also, during our fellowship, we went in-depth in terms of the planning process. So, now we are always thinking about clear outcomes and results, and the planning that has to be in place: who was doing what.

In addition to these examples, Ms Neemia's degree in cyber security has equipped her with the skills and networks to encourage and support Geek Girl Academy in Samoa. Furthermore, the skills she gained on award continue to be foundational to the community workshops she is involved in, educating the community on safety and responsibility in the use of technology.

4. Conclusion

This case study investigates the contribution to development of Australia Awards alumni who are active in civil society through advocacy and volunteerism. It draws on GTF survey data from thousands of alumni and then uses interviews with 8 alumni from across the Pacific and South-East Asia to better understand the diverse ways alumni are agents of change, contributing to sustainable development outside their paid employment. It shows how alumni engagement in volunteering and advocacy activities contributes to achieving the overall Australia Awards Program Outcomes. It also provides insight into the role of the Australia Awards experience, skills, knowledge, and networks in building capacity and commitment of alumni to contribute to civil society post award.

The evidence presented in this report suggests that the Australia Awards Program Outcomes are being achieved through alumni engagement and contributions to civil society. It highlights that Australia Awards go beyond providing human resource capacity development within the labour force to have a wider impact on civil society through alumni volunteer contributions, often at grassroots, community level. In many cases, this has caused a ripple effect, helping to strengthen governance and institutional capacity of local churches, schools, community groups, and professional associations through alumni sharing technical expertise to improve practices and train others. Alumni are also helping to transform societal attitudes and behaviours within their communities through advocacy and by working closely with government and other organisations to enact change in areas such as gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), education, poverty reduction, and climate change.

This report shows that although many alumni were already involved in their local communities before going on award, their Australia Awards experience had a demonstrable impact on their contributions to civil society. Alumni highlighted that their scholarship or fellowship helped deepen their motivation to 'give back' to their community post award, equipping them with skills, knowledge and networks to provide leadership to address developmental challenges at the community level.

A key implication of these findings is the need to broaden contemporary understanding of the ways that alumni of the Australia Awards are contributing to development. There is a need to look beyond the workplace and build evidence of the broader societal impact these leaders have across their communities. One way of doing this could be to expand the collection of data on alumni outcomes to more accurately identify contributions to civil society. There is existing work in some other large-scale scholarship programs, such as the Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program (IFP) Alumni Tracking Study (IIE, 2021; Kallick & Brown Murga, 2018) that could help inform this thinking. In the context of the Australia Awards, this could be done at the country/regional program and global level to ensure a deeper and more nuanced understanding on the impact of alumni on development.

In working towards this, the GTF is currently adjusting its survey and case study instruments to collect information more specifically relating to volunteerism and advocacy, with the intention that these will begin to help address these gaps in our understanding of the impact of alumni outside their paid employment. As part of this future research, GTF researchers will work across the Australia Awards Monitoring and Evaluation Community of Practice to help develop a shared understanding of approaches to collecting further information from alumni and analysing the outcomes in both a local and global context.

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6. Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank (ADB)
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)
ALE	Adult Learning and Education
ASPBAE	Asia-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)
CAE	Council of Adult Education (CAE)
COVID-19	2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GAP	Gay Asian Proud (GAP)
GCE	Global Campaign for Education (GCE)
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)
GTF	Australian Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF)
ICAE	International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)
IT	Information Technology
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/ Questioning, Asexual (and other gender non-conforming identities)
MFA	Marrakesh Framework for Action (MFA)
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
RMIT University	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SKK	Sangkheum Kumar Kampuchea (The Hope of the Children)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UNV	United Nations Volunteers (programme)
WLI	Women's Leadership Initiative (DFAT initiative, now known as 'Women Leading and Influencing')

Annex 1: Interview participants

Name	Gender	Country	Award/Year	Field of study/ Institution	Civil Society contribution/s	Current Employment
Mr Ronnel de Rio	M	Philippines	Australia Award Fellowship, 2015	<i>'Empowering Leaders to Develop a Disability-Inclusive Vocational Education Framework in the Philippines'</i> , Charlton Brown (Brisbane)	Disability advocate / Professional Association: Philippine Chamber of Massage Industry of Visually Impaired	Housing and Home site Affairs Officer, Provincial Government of Batangas, Philippines
Mr Sinthay Neb	M	Cambodia	Australia Award Fellowship, 2014	<i>'Sector Wide Approach to the Implementation of Rights-Based Inclusive Development in Cambodia'</i> , Queensland University of Technology	Education: Founder and chairman for local organization (Sangkheum Kumar Kampuchea, SKK) to promote rural education for poor children.	National Deputy Team Leader (DTL), Asian Development Bank, Cambodia
Ms Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong	F	Vietnam	Australian Development Scholarship, 2000–2001	Master of Science (Meteorology) from Monash University	Environment: Volunteer – Ninomya – Hanoi City's Lake area clean up volunteer group.	Retired in 2014, former IT Consultant and hydrometeorology at Minh Viet IT Company, Vietnam
Dr Jose Roberto Guevara	M	Philippines (lives in Australia)	John Crawford Scholarship Scheme, 1994–1996	Master of Environmental Sciences Monash University	Professional Associations: President of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), Board Member for Asia Pacific for the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).	Associate Professor in International Development, RMIT University, Australia
Ms Tagiilima Neemia (Lima)	F	Samoa	Australia Awards Scholarship & Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI), 2018–2019	Master of Cyber Security RMIT University	Gender: Geek Girl Academy – volunteer program for coding and IT skills for girls in Samoa.	Principal PC/Network Officer, Samoa Ministry of Finance, Samoa
Ms Shannon Coalala Toutou	F	Fiji	Australian Development Scholarship, 2000–2002	Master of Human Resources Management, Curtin University	Faith based: Communication Director & leaders of Ambassador's Club	Employment Relations Tribunal member for the Judicial Department in Fiji.
Ms Endang Soares da Silva	F	Timor-Leste	Australia Awards Scholarship, 2016–2018	Master of Laboratory Medicine, RMIT University	Gender & Health: donor, small enterprise; and host of health volunteers	Executive Director of the National Health Laboratory, Timor-Leste
Alum A	-	Vietnam	Australian Development Scholarship, 2000s ⁵	Master of Applied Linguists, University of Melbourne	Education: Donor and volunteer	Senior Educator, Education Sector, Vietnam

5 Details withheld to protect Alum A's identity

Annex 2: Interview Guides

1. Could you please tell us your name, your current position and organisation, and the qualification you completed as part of your Australia Awards scholarship or fellowship?
 2. What was your motivation or goal in applying to study in Australia?
 3. Can you tell us about your time in Australia and experience as a student, we're interested in both: your academic and social, 'life' experiences?
 - a. Did you become involved in any community groups or professional associations while living in Australia (for example: church, sporting clubs or professional bodies related to your field such as 'Engineers Australia')?
 - b. Have you maintained any of these connections? Have any of these connections helped or supported your community work? Please provide example/s?
 4. Can you tell us about your experience when you returned after your scholarship or fellowship?
 - a. How was your experience reintegrating to the workplace or looking for work post award?
 - b. Briefly – can you please tell us a little about your career pathway post award? (Your current role and responsibilities)
 5. We are interested in your involvement in your local community as a volunteer or community leader.
 - a. What do you do?
 - b. What was your motivation that led you to be involved?
 - c. Do you work with an organisation or foundation (formal) or volunteer less formally through your community?
 - d. Did you volunteer or have a community leadership role prior to going on award or after you returned? Or Both?
 - e. How often do you volunteer? (Regularly (weekly or monthly), episodically or in response to specific events or needs)
 6. Thinking about this community work/volunteering [refer to examples provided above], since completing your scholarship or fellowship, have you been able to apply your experiences from studying in Australia? Can you provide some examples?
 7. Furthermore, have any of the connections/friends/networks you made while in Australia helped in the community/volunteering contributions you have been involved in?
 8. Can you describe a community-based achievement that you are most proud of?
- That covers our questions today, is there anything you would like to add?