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**Achieving potential in a progressive workplace:** The ANZ bank in Lao PDR specifically encourages Australia Awards scholars to apply during its recruitment rounds, considering them to be ‘just miles ahead’ of others. Ten per cent of ANZ Lao staff are Australia Awards alumni. The bank’s strong commitment to women’s leadership has allowed women with Australian qualifications to flourish. All of the Lao women on the bank’s executive committee in Vientiane are Australian alumnus. These women felt that increased visibility of women in the private sector does have a broader influence. (Photo: Anna Lockley)

Since the 1990’s Australia has provided scholarships for men and women from developing countries to study at Australian tertiary institutions to ‘develop leadership potential’. Recipients are expected to ‘make a significant contribution to their home countries as leaders in field’ and be part of an ‘engaged and influential global network of leaders, advocates and change-makers’.

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) is an independent branch within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The full evaluation report and the management response to it can be accessed at www.ode.dfat.gov.au.

The evaluation found that:

- Most women are employed after returning home.
- Just over three quarters of women report having greater operational or technical responsibility, and just over half report having greater financial responsibility within the first three years of return from a scholarship.
- Most women move into higher positions after their scholarships.
- Almost all women and their supervisors felt that scholarships contributed to a great or medium extent to professional advancement.
Scholarships help women become leaders

The evaluation found that as well as enabling women to advance professionally, scholarships helped women develop the personal attributes, vision and broad range of skills needed for leadership. The scholarship experience of living in Australia for an extended time was frequently cited as being transformative by catalysing development of attributes including independence, confidence, self-belief and open-mindedness. These attributes help women see themselves as leaders, a critical prerequisite for leadership.

‘There is a difference for women who study in (their home) country. They are less outspoken and less confident and don’t feel fully confident to express their opinion. Women who have studied overseas are very confident...they are independent.’

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The evaluation found that Australia Awards alumnae are exercising leadership in many ways, in many settings and at many levels. Women interviewed placed strong importance on mentoring and guiding others as being a critical aspect of leadership. More than half of women reported that after returning from their scholarship they were supervising more staff and most of them considered that this was largely due to their scholarship.

After returning home many women show leadership by transferring a range of skills to others both formally in the workplace and informally in other settings.

Source: Global analysis of tracer studies

Improving women’s leadership outcomes

The evaluation identified actions needed to further improve women’s leadership from an already promising base. These actions include ensuring women have access to and are awarded scholarships to at least achieve gender parity, using activities to build on gains from scholarships and improving monitoring and evaluation.

Concerted, well considered efforts have succeeded in increasing the number of women receiving scholarships in some of the most difficult contexts. The work done by Australia Awards Pakistan provides a good model of how parity can be achieved in difficult contexts. Overall women received 55 per cent of scholarships in 2013 and 2014. The proportion of scholarships awarded to women varies greatly at the country level. In some countries, including Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa and Tonga, over 60 percent go to women. In other countries less than half are awarded to women with some falling well short of parity. This may serve to entrench gender inequity.

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Scholarships contribute to women’s professional advancement but the proportion of women who reported positive outcomes for a broad range of measures was consistently less than that for men. While some of the gender differences are small, if women are disadvantaged in many different ways the cumulative impact of this may be sufficient to make it much harder for women to become leaders.

Source: Global analysis of tracer studies

The myth of meritocracy has two dimensions:
1. Those assessing ‘merit’ are heavily shaped by their experiences and values which are influenced by gender. For example, the areas of expertise and types of work valued by women are often undervalued by men.
2. The person being assessed is shaped by self-belief and by opportunity both of which are highly gendered. For example, women, often have shorter and less continuous time in the work place than their male colleagues.

When women and men return to their previous work place after completing a scholarship the likelihood that they will be promoted varies according to the sector they work in. Interestingly, for both genders the probability of being promoted to a higher position is much greater in the private sector or civil society than in the public sector. In all work places men are more likely to be promoted than women.

Source: Global analysis of tracer studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society organisation</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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Women also reported that overseas study taught them how to work in more effective ways. Examples given included working faster, evidence-based decision making, valuing teamwork and the ability to understand and respect different social and cultural norms. Studying in a developed country provided an opportunity to see how different systems can work and learn from countries or provincial settings where women experience particularly restrictive and discriminatory social and cultural norms. Studying in a developed country provides an opportunity to see how systems can work, which helps develop a vision for change that is integral to effective leadership.

‘[I saw] how well arranged the infrastructure in Australia was in terms of public transportation, water systems, and roads. It gave me ideas of how to design urban settlements, and how to make the proper plans to manage infrastructure.’

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…one thing that I gained in Australia is the fact that you need to do your research, before you make any changes or voice your opinion …’  

Alumna, civil society. Samoa.

Notably there were also some changed attitudes and observed behaviours amongst male alumni around women’s leadership and workplace roles.

‘If men have completed overseas study they are more respectful of females. If they have just been working here it is quite difficult to delegate.’  

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There was broad support amongst women interviewed for post-scholarship leadership training in their home environment. Promising innovation in this area includes an initiative in Mongolia working with both women and men and a short course in Indonesia for female leaders in civil society. Australia Awards alumni associations have been established in many countries to maintain engagement with scholars but have not been used effectively to support women’s leadership. The Africa Women in Leadership Network provides a good model of how alumni associations can be used to support women’s leadership.

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Scholarships and through more strategic use of different types of Australia Award and post award activities.

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### Key Findings

- **Scholarships** give women the professional skills which help them advance in their careers despite persistent gender barriers.
- **Scholarships** enable women to develop the personal attributes, vision and broad range of skills needed for leadership.
- **Women’s leadership outcomes from scholarships** could be improved by increasing women’s access to scholarships and through more strategic use of different types of Australia Award and post award activities.

### Why prioritise women’s leadership?

- **1. Rights** — women have equal human rights to men and therefore to opportunities in social, political, and professional life.
- **2. Effectiveness** — the issues facing society are complex and therefore require a diverse range of inputs for effective solutions; and **3. Representation** — women are more likely to consider the broad range of needs and interests present in societies.

### Scholarships facilitate women’s career progression

Professional advancement helps women reach positions where they can learn and practice skills necessary for leadership. The evaluation found that Australia Awards Scholarships makes a clear contribution to women’s professional advancement. Scholarships are a disproportionally important mechanism for women to advance because in many countries the prevalence of discriminatory norms and attitudes limit women’s academic and professional opportunities. Women reported that the combination of higher technical skills, the prestige accompanying an overseas tertiary qualification, and often increased proficiency in English, gave them an advantage over other job applicants and helped them to skip runs on the professional ladder.

**‘The first [step towards leadership] was actually receiving the Australian Scholarship because for many of us in the country without a western education, the starting point in your career would be considerably lower. So with the Australian education or qualification you already start at a level above the majority in the country.’ Alma. Private sector, Lao PDR.**

### The evaluation found that:

- **Most women** are employed after returning home.
- **Just over three quarters of women report** having greater operational or technical responsibility, and just over half report having greater financial responsibility within the first three years of return from a scholarship.
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The Office of Development Effectiveness evaluated the contribution that scholarships make to women’s leadership. The evaluation included interviews, a document review, and a global analysis of tracer studies in which scholars are asked about experiences and outcomes after completion of their scholarships. Actions needed to improve women’s leadership outcomes from scholarships were identified.

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