Australia Awards

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility

Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: WLI alumni reflections and insights

February 2024

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Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Executive Summary

This case study is Phase 2 of a sequential mixed-methods analysis undertaken by the Global Tracer Facility (GTF) into the long-term impact of the Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) enrichment program on developmental leadership in the Pacific. It builds upon findings from a social network analysis (SNA) conducted in Phase 1, which examined connections between WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3 (2017 to 2019) of the WLI Leadership and Mentoring Program[1] (Buckley et al., 2023).

For Phase 2 of this research approach, the GTF worked closely with locally based researchers in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Fiji to conduct in-depth interviews of five nominated key network members identified in Phase 1 to capture rich contextual insights into women's leadership in PNG and Fiji.

Key findings

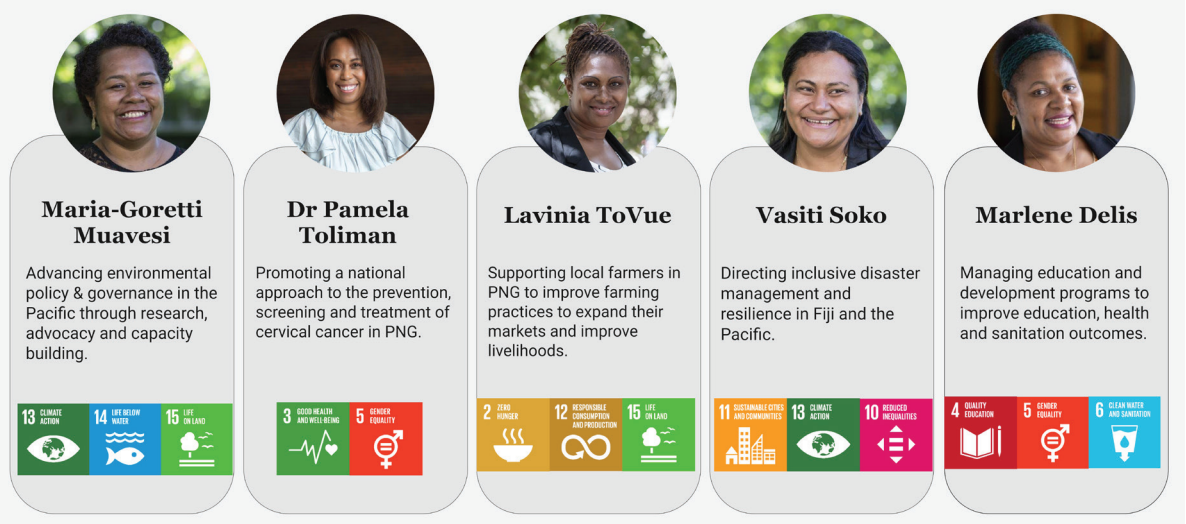
The case study found that the WLI alumni interviewed are driving developmental change in their workplaces and in their local communities through utilising their unique technical skills and knowledge, and taking 'relational and collective' (Jackson, et.al. 2022) approaches to the exercise of developmental leadership in their communities.

The case study identified that these WLI leaders were driving change through:

- connecting others
- building and maintaining authentic relationships
- collaboration, organisational leadership, and technical expertise, and
- gender representation.

These women are making significant contributions to development through everyday leadership in their communities through volunteering, and in their professional careers in areas such as environmental law and conservation, disaster management and preparedness, health research and health policy, education and development initiatives, food security and prosperity.

Alumni Snapshot of contributions



1 Now referred to as the Women's Developmental Leadership Program (WDLP).

These contributions clearly demonstrate the achievement of Australia Awards long-term Program Outcome 1: Alumni are using their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.

The study found that participation in on award activities and the WLI ontological leadership training provided alumni with increased confidence in their technical skills and gave them access to expanded networks through connections to fellow scholars, classmates, Australian mentors and industry contacts. Alumni continued to cultivate these relationships which have formed strong coalitions of support to enable them to effectively drive change within their context.

Of particular interest, the study shows strong evidence that these alumni use the shared experience of the WLI program to activate coalitions of support and change through their WLI 'sisterhood' which acts as a safe and trusted network to seek advice and reassurance, share expertise and experiences, gain contextual insights and access additional professional connections from like-minded women in the Pacific.

These findings demonstrate that these alumni are achieving Australia Awards long-term Program Outcome 2: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

Implications for the Australia Awards

The interview data collected in this study, and the data from the linked SNA study of WLI alumni show that that enrichment programs such as WLI play an important role in building leadership capacity and professional networks of emerging leaders. GTF data from previous studies also provide evidence to suggest that enrichment programs add value to the Australia Awards experience through strengthening alumni understanding of their role as change makers, and the importance of using their technical expertise and networks to support and drive developmental change (Doyle & Edwards, 2022).

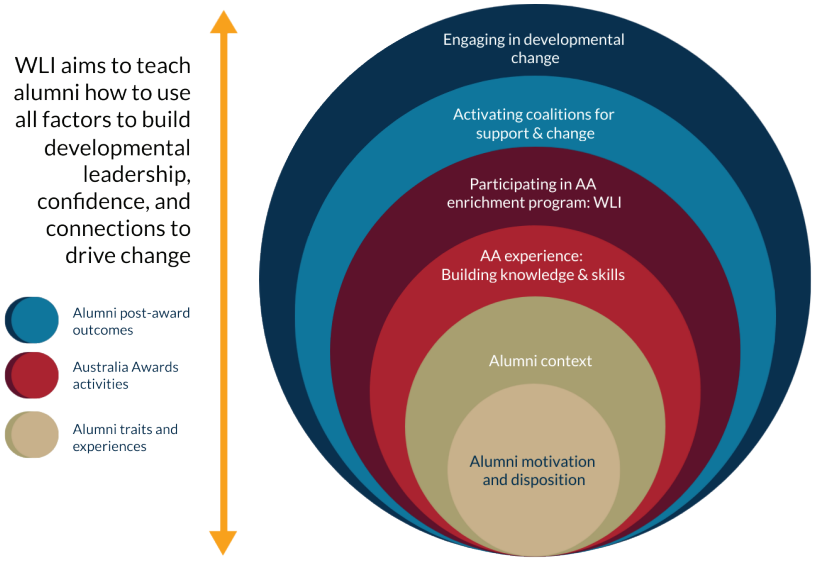
Evidence also shows that there is a strong shared identity or 'sisterhood' which has developed through the WLI program. Alumni continue to use their strong connections to support each other professionally and personally.

While the barriers (not dissimilar to previous GTF research) identified by alumni slowed their leadership momentum and change-agency on their return from award, the recommendations that follow highlight the multi-level (e.g. individual, program, regional, award) opportunities afforded to WLI alumni that enhanced their Australia Award experience and supported and enabled their capacity to facilitate developmental change. Some recommendations that could enhance other, future enrichment initiatives and leadership training beyond the core Australia Awards degree are:

- Embedding intentional networking activities on award such as industry specific mentoring, networking events, work placements, and engagement activities to facilitate connections and build awareness of the importance of coalitions to support and drive developmental change.
- Strengthening alumni understanding of their role as change makers through ontological leadership training on award to build confidence in their technical and leadership skills.
- Facilitating a sense of shared identity and camaraderie among alumni through targeted, theme-based engagement, mentoring and expertise exchange post award via online forums, events, and the establishment of communities of practice.
- Providing post award support for the transition back into the workforce through access to funded professional development opportunities, internships, and local or regionally based mentors.
- Provision of targeted funding for collaborative project work between AA alumni to support ongoing capacity building in their local communities through Alumni Grants and regional alumni activities such as workshops or projects.

The influence of the Australia Awards and the WLI experience on developmental change

Factors influencing WLI alumni contributions to development



Factors	Examples
Engaging in developmental change	◦ Improved health outcomes for women and girls ◦ Environmental protection and sustainability ◦ Disaster management and preparedness ◦ Food security and economic prosperity ◦ Improved education
Activating coalitions for support & change	Tapping into WLI alumnae expertise for: ◦ context ◦ technical expertise ◦ social capital, additional connections ◦ mentoring ◦ 'sisterhood', shared identity, camaraderie
Participating in Australia Awards on-award enrichment: Women Leading & Influencing (WLI)	◦ Leadership skills and behaviours ◦ Confidence ◦ Self-reflection ◦ Networking and connections
Australia Awards experience: building knowledge and skills	◦ Technical knowledge ◦ Networking ◦ Changing world view ◦ Confidence
Alumni context	◦ Culture ◦ Workplace ◦ Community connections ◦ Family

Enablers to developmental leadership:
- relationship building
- trust and connections
- shared experience
- collaborating
- confidence in leadership

Barriers to developmental leadership:
- women's under-representation
- limitations to advancement
- unemployment due to skills mismatch

1. Introduction

1.1 Information about the GTF

The Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) commenced in 2016 and is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Research by the GTF helps DFAT to assess the development contributions and public and economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment in the Australia Awards. The key research and reporting activities being undertaken annually by the GTF are a quantitative Global Tracer Survey and qualitative Case Studies, which are prepared concurrently throughout the project.

The purpose of all GTF research is to examine the impact of the Australia Awards and its overall aim; that is, to support partner countries to achieve their development goals through education and knowledge transfer, and to build enduring relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests. Linked to this aim are two long-term program outcomes outlined in *the Australia Awards Global Strategic Framework* and *Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework*:

- Program Outcome 1: Alumni use their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.
- Program Outcome 2: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

Over the last three years, the GTF has used social network analysis (SNA) to explore networks of Australia Award alumni to better understand how these networks form and how alumni use these networks to support their professional development. SNA involves examining the patterns of interaction between people and studying how these patterns can influence the individual.

1.2 Exploring connections informed SNA

This case study is Phase 2 of a sequential mixed-methods analysis project in the GTF. Phase 1 used SNA to explore the long-term impact of the Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) Leadership and Mentoring program[2], an 18 month on-award and post award enrichment program for Australia Awards alumni in the Pacific (Buckley et al., 2023). This second phase takes the findings of Phase 1 and explores outcomes further through in-depth interviews with WLI alumni.

The WLI program is a high-profile initiative designed to support Australia Award alumni from the Pacific to build their developmental leadership skills through on-award and reintegration enrichment activities[3]. Developmental leadership is conceptualised in the program as 'as a political process that mobilises people and resources towards a collective outcome' (Lovai et al, 2022, p6).

Women from the first three cohorts of the WLI program were the focus of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project. These women completed the face-to-face intensive Leadership and Mentoring Program workshops in Australia in 2018 (Cohorts 1 and 2) and 2019 (Cohort 3) while on-award and then returned to their home countries. As part of the program these women participated in a range of enrichment activities including professional mentoring, networking events, ontological leadership coaching, workplace internships, professional development opportunities, and had access to leadership funding for small scale development projects in their countries on their return from award.

2 Now referred to as the Women's Developmental Leadership Program (WDLP).
3 Women Leading and Influencing. "About WLI". Women Leading and Influencing. https://www.wliprogram.org/about-us (accessed February 2024)





WLI alumni in Cohorts 1, 2 (pictured on the left) and 3 (pictured on the right) during intensive workshops for the program. Photos courtesy of DFAT/ Esh Photography

In Phase 1, SNA was used to identify key alumni across the three cohorts that were using their skills, knowledge, and connections in line with developmental leadership priorities. To achieve this goal, alumni were asked to respond to three social network questions:

- Which WLI alumni would you go to for advice to overcome professional challenges (e.g. implementing change at work, dealing with difficult relationships, managing difficult projects)?
- Which WLI alumni are actively mentoring or supporting the leadership development of other women in their context?
- Which WLI alumni are actively using their leadership skills and networks to address a particular issue or challenge?

Eight alumni were more frequently identified by their WLI peers as displaying these developmental leadership qualities via their observable support of peers and work to create sustainable change. Additional social network questions were also used in the case study to explore professional support and collaborative connections between alumni. Network statistics were calculated for these networks and highlighted four alumni across the three cohorts who were 'brokers' or individuals whose position in the network led them to have a stronger influence over information flow between their WLI peers. In total these 4 brokers and 8 leaders represented 12 key network members of Cohorts 1-3.

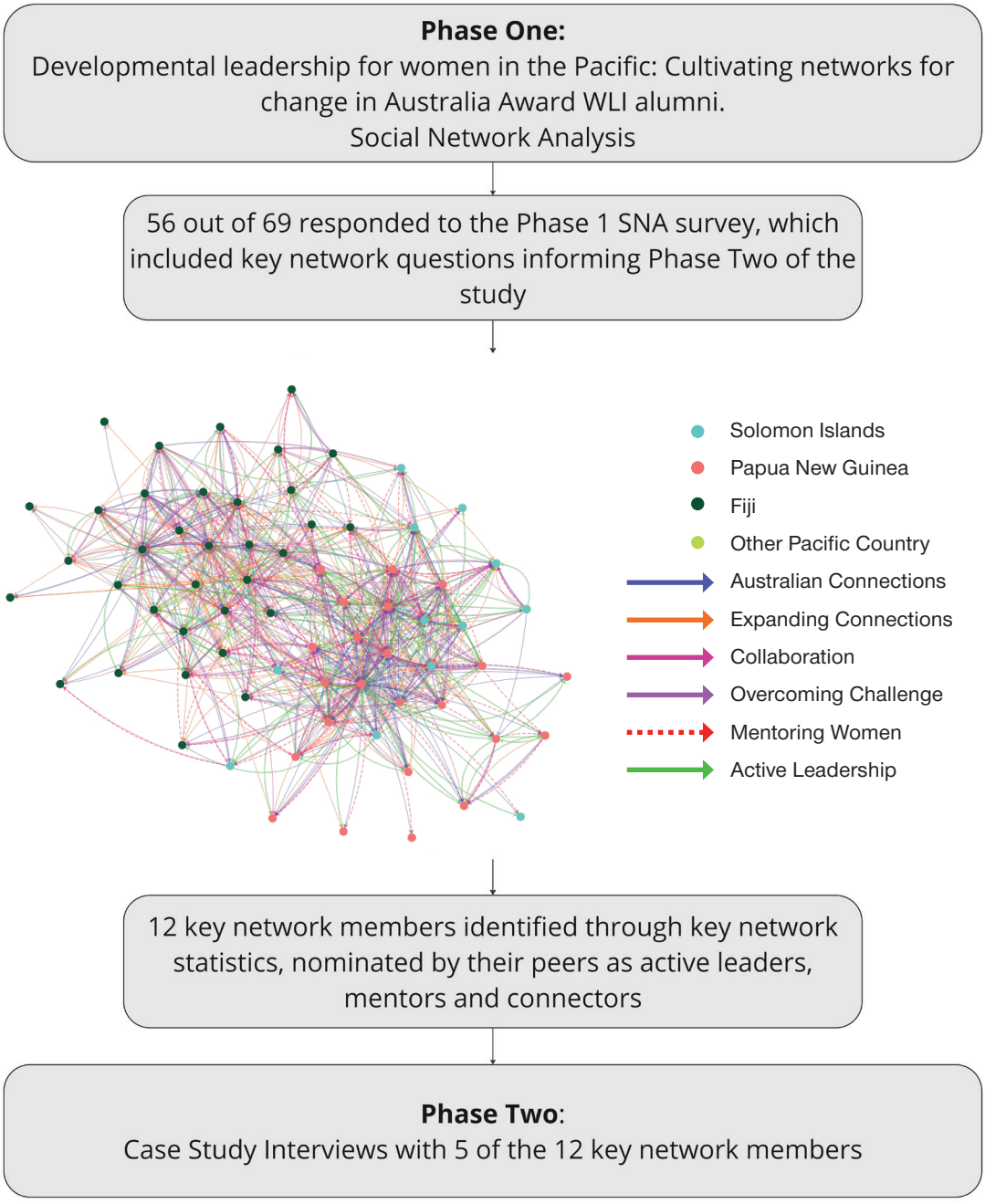
Across all the network data collected, findings showed that alumni were using their connections with WLI peers to support their leadership activities through coalitions for change and coalitions for support.

The current case study, Phase 2 of the project, was designed to offer a deeper, contextual understanding of how the Australia Awards and WLI program have influenced the leadership development of a sample of the key network members identified in Phase 1. Phase 2 was also intended to provide further insight into how the identified coalitions for change and coalitions for support operated to help these women thrive in their unique contexts.

1.3 Partnership with the WLI

In both Phase 1 (SNA study) and Phase 2 (alumni interviews) of this project, the GTF team worked in partnership with WLI to design the research questions and data collection tools and to optimise alumni engagement during fieldwork. Both phases of the project demonstrate the benefits of DFAT programs working in partnership so that different program strengths and insight can be used in combination to understand the long-term impact of both the Australia Awards and enrichment programs like the WLI initiative.

Figure 1: Linking Phase One and Phase Two of the WLI mixed methods GTF project



1.4 Case study objectives

Phase 1 demonstrated that WLI alumni from Cohorts 1-3 are using their skills, connections, and personal drive to implement developmental change in their home countries and communities (Program Outcome 1). It also showed that the Australia Award experience and the WLI program helped alumni to form ongoing professional networks of support with alumni from their own and other countries (Program Outcome 2).

The current study builds on the findings of Phase 1, with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of how the Australia Awards and the WLI program strengthened alumni capacity to contribute to developmental change through coalitions for change and coalitions for support.

Specifically, the research questions for this project are:

1. How are the identified leaders using their leadership skills to drive change in their communities?
2. How did the WLI program and alumni's broader experience of their Australia Awards scholarship help them to develop their leadership skills and create networks (coalitions for change) to enact developmental change and support others?

The findings of this study are intended to be used by the Australia Awards and WLI to inform future programming and policy to help facilitate intentional alumni networks and relationships which support collective leadership for change. For WLI, this will be beneficial to existing approaches to programming and work currently underway. For the Australia Awards more generally, the outcomes will offer insight into the way in which enrichment programs can be developed in differing contexts to improve the long-term program outcomes.

1.5 Approach and participants

In Phase 2, the GTF selected six alumni to interview from the 12 key network members identified in Phase 1. One alumna was unable to participate in the research due to work commitments. A total of five alumni participated in the case study, three from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and two from Fiji.

To capture a deep contextual understanding of female leadership in the Pacific, the GTF recruited local researchers to support the fieldwork, Dr Mercy Masta (PNG) and Ms Lorissa Hazelman (Fiji). Prior to fieldwork, the GTF consulted WLI and the local researchers to review and refine the interview instrument (see Appendix A). The GTF provided training and support to the local researchers and GTF researchers accompanied Ms Hazelman to the interviews in Fiji.

Interviews were semi structured and conducted in English. The team undertook four face-to-face and one online interview. All interviews took place across October and November of 2023. Figure 2 shows the profiles of alumni that were interviewed for this case study.

Figure 2: Alumni profiles



Vasiti Soko

Master of Geospatial Science, RMIT 2017-2018. WLI Cohort 3.

Director, National Disaster Management Office, Fiji



Maria-Goretti Muavesi

Master of Fisheries, University of Wollongong, 2019. WLI Cohort 3.

Head Environmental Legal Officer at the IUCN Oceania Regional Office, Fiji



Marlene Delis

Master of Education in Leadership, Flinders University 2017-2018. WLI Cohort 3

Program Manager, Kokoda Program, Australian High Commission, PNG



Dr Pamela Toliman

PhD Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, 2020. WLI Cohort 2.

Senior Research Fellow at the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research



Lavinia ToVue

Master of Agribusiness, University of Queensland, 2016-2018. WLI Cohort 1.

National Facilitator, Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Program, PNG

2. Driving change in the Pacific

This chapter addresses the first research question: 'How are the identified leaders using their leadership skills to drive change in their communities?' Building on previous research on ontological leadership (Andrews et al, 2010; Howard, 2019), development (Roche et al., 2020), women in leadership (Nakamura et al, 2022) and leadership from the Pacific perspective (Hattori, 2016; Sanga et al., 2016; Spark et al., 2018), evidence from this case study shows that alumni leadership skills were enhanced by participation in the Australia Awards and WLI.

The alumni selected for interviewing in this study were identified through the research in Phase 1 as key persons who are actively working to implement developmental change and are also seen as peers who mentor, coach, network with and support their fellow alumni in their leadership journeys. Underpinned by the strong emphasis on relationship building in the Pacific, Phase 2 data demonstrated that alumni also saw leading as giving, being of service to others, as well as acting as role models that build on women's leadership in all aspects, often supporting their WLI peers and others through their work and community involvement. Brief summaries of how alumni use their leadership skills in their developmental change journeys is provided in this chapter. A more detailed analysis of how alumni use their connections to connect others for developmental change follows these summaries.

2.1 Driving change through connecting others

All alumni interviewed expressed that being connected to each other, and connecting others, was essential to their whole experience as an Australia Awards and WLI alumni. Linking back to Phase 1 of the SNA study, alumni were asked about what they believed made them a well-connected leader that their peers could approach for support and advice.

Alumni perceived that they were considered as well-connected leaders because they were:

- 'Genuine', 'using networks to educate, engage with people in a meaningful way to bring value', able 'to effortlessly and seamlessly build trust and rapport'. (Dr Toliman)
- Effective communicators, 'having the time to talk to people, having the time to listen and also making an effort to meet people who are trying to make a difference, no matter how big or small'. (Ms Soko)
- Willing 'to share', 'creating a learning space' and 'platforms where we're able to share and learn from each other'. (Ms Muavesi)
- Well-connected to 'different networks, to sort of just refer people and introduce them to different people'. (Ms ToVue)
- In a role that facilitated networking. (Ms Delis)

Delving into their connectedness with each other to drive change, alumni shared examples of similar interests and networks. These have included the sharing of ideas with each other and sharing support. These aspects were enabled through their role at work, as well as their projects within WLI. Further details on how these alumni have built coalitions for change and coalitions of support through these connections are expanded upon in Chapter 3.

The experience of being in Australia for the duration of the scholarship has contributed to networking with fellow students, as well as overall international student experience. As Ms ToVue described:

> *Apart from the courses, and all the academy stuff, to be there to experience and learning things outside of the education.... I guess I really made use of that, and did different things, got involved in activities with other groups of people.*

Intentional networking and actively looking for opportunities to build relationships with alumni from the Australia Awards and WLI were also noted for alumni. The examples of connections alumni have made with industry partners are illustrated below:

> *A lot of the connection is work and interests, and some of it is just bouncing off ideas. My role sort of comes back to working with the partners, finding different service providers. (Ms ToVue)*

> *I go to things with an expressed intent to bring value. Or I'm trying to build connections that will help. (Dr Toliman)*

> *I have to find connection to Capital [government]... But part of the discussion is to talk about the sustainability of whatever mechanism that we are going to establish, including financing for it...Hopefully that Australian network that I currently have will help me get there. (Ms Muavesi)*

Having broad networks and connecting others through peer introductions and networking was a common thread of all five alumni. Importantly, connecting others to relevant network contacts is also based on tacit understandings of peer and personal expertise. Some examples of this are illustrated below:

> *I'm really comfortable now when people approach me [for help] and I say, "Actually, I'd love to help, but I think there's someone better". And then put them in touch – and I might come [along] for one or two of the initial meetings... [then say] "I think you guys are ready to run with this without me." Just having the grace to allow other people to shine. (Dr Toliman)*

> *Yeah, just when someone reach[es] out and it's like - even if I don't have all the answers I might go, "Maybe this person would be probably closer, a more appropriate person to talk to." (Ms ToVue)*

2.2. Driving change through building and maintaining authentic relationships

The building of authentic and meaningful relationships through genuine engagement with others is seen by alumni to be fundamental to driving developmental change in their communities and beyond. All five women interviewed described the value of making authentic connections, seeking out and maintaining networks that they can support, as well as be supported by peers from WLI and their professional networks. The ways in which WLI connections between alumni are used to support each other and enable change are detailed in Section 3.2.4.

Focusing on the importance of approaching others with genuine interest and sincerity, Dr Toliman noted that growing as a leader is synonymous with maintaining and looking after new and old relationships, 'being proactive and checking the temperature with people'. Reciprocity in making and maintaining connections was also considered important, with Ms ToVue highlighting that relationships are about taking and giving back.

For some alumni, the building of relationships in professional networks are important, allowing for a greater extent of support and coordination. Specific to the role that Ms Soko plays in managing disaster response efforts, she notes that prior relationship building is essential and pre-emptive towards efficient disaster management in Fiji. This was exemplified in her account of bringing together fellow emergency responders from 14 Pacific Island countries to conduct an exercise on 'urban search and rescues... where we were able to train our first responders...You bring them when we are preparing so that they can establish that relationship'.

Underpinned by effective communication skills and opportunities to connect with fellow WLI alumni, the relationships formed through the WLI experience are observed to be based on trust and mutual responsibility, entrenched in the values of providing service to others, genuine caring and compassion. Alumni attributed the WLI network as being essential to fostering relationships with 'like-minded women around the Pacific', fostering a sense of connection to know each other's interest and expertise to enable change.

Ms Soko summed it up with the following:

> *In the Pacific we're all about building relationships.... So, this WLI program allows women that are going to be leaders to establish a relationship where they network.*

2.3. Driving change through collaboration, organisational leadership, and technical expertise

Beyond building authentic relationships with their WLI peers and with their professional colleagues, all five women showcased their organisational leadership skills in their workplaces. As a group, alumni reflected on instances where they performed leadership roles in their places of work and within their communities, where confidence in technical expertise, skills and knowledge influence decision making and impetus for change.

An example of driving change through collaboration is that of Ms ToVue, who works with both the public and private sector to facilitate agricultural market access for small businesses. Another alumna, Ms Soko leads in this way too, describing the importance of professional collaboration as looking for opportunities to build relationships with others in the community as well as industry.

> *This position [Director of Disaster Management] allowed me to connect with people in the industry... So being passionate about helping others is just bringing those people along with me on this journey and then connecting and making it easy for projects (Ms Soko)*

Alumni further provided evidence of how they practice organisational leadership. Ms Delis, for example, indicated that her role as an organisational leader was to not only manage 'different people from different backgrounds (but also) trying to play your leadership role in helping them.' Dr Toliman views her leadership as responsibility for driving research and dissemination in her work. She reflected that her job is to 'basically lead – secure research grants... run research, write it up, publish, and get more research funding.'

Role modelling was highlighted as another important aspect of organisational leadership. As shared by Ms Muavesi, in order to build trust, respect and support, it is important for leaders to model the behaviour and attitudes they think are important. In expressing this approach, Ms Muavesi said:

> *People see me as somebody that has to take the lead. So, if I'm not coming to the office on time, if I am not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, if I'm not acting in a way that a leader is supposed to be acting, they don't see that, they won't respect me, they won't follow me.*

Technical expertise acquired through the Australia Award experience was also seen as essential to driving change. For example, Ms Soko attributes her ability to lead Fiji in disaster management due to her in-depth knowledge of geospatial science, where she is able to 'justify the reasons using science as opposed to just hypotheses.'

2.4. Driving change through empowerment

Alumni shared examples of driving change in their communities through active representation, advocating for equity, inclusivity and breaking gender norms and barriers that are culturally entrenched. Collectively, alumni saw themselves as positive role models, empowering the women and girls in their communities.

A strong example of this was shared by Ms Soko, who described how a photo taken of her as the only female in a group of government advisors briefing the Prime Minster of Fiji was shared with young girls in schools to 'advocate to young girls that you can also go beyond your capability ... because it shares – it breaks that barrier'.

Ms Delis further discussed her feelings in this regard in the following way:

> *We talk about a lot of things, women empowerment issues... How do I use my leadership in a place where people always put that negative connotation around, oh, men suppress women and how do we come out as a woman leader and influence the change we want to see.*

3. Networks and coalitions formed through the AA/WLI experience

This chapter addresses the second research question: 'How did the WLI program and alumni's broader experience of their Australia Awards scholarship help them to develop their leadership skills and create networks (coalitions for change) to enact developmental change and support others?' Building on previous GTF research that has demonstrated the value of the Australia Award experience for strengthening alumni's technical knowledge, evidence from the interviews show that the broader experiences of alumni while on Award and their participation in the WLI program:

- built on their knowledge of ontological leadership skills (including inter-cultural competencies),
- contributed to continued networks with fellow scholars and mentors,
- established a sense of shared sisterhood through coalitions of support and coalitions for change.

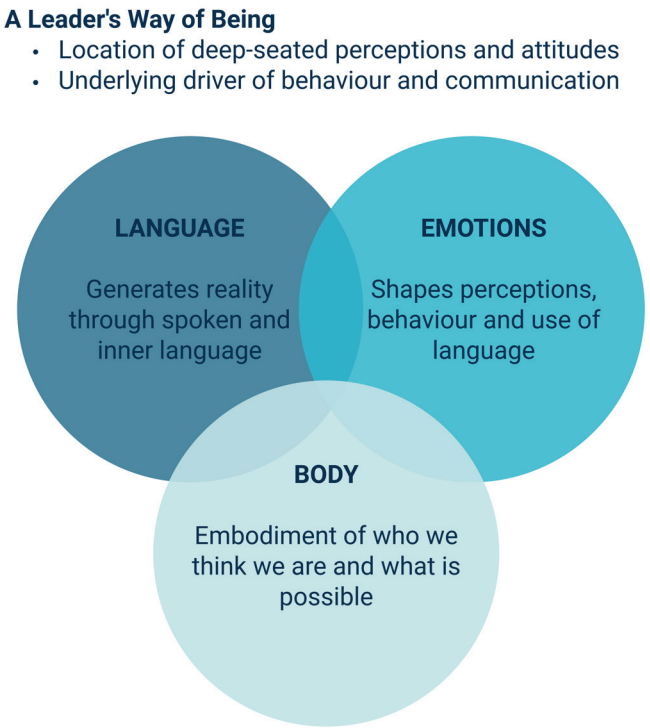
3.1 Building ontological leadership skills: WLI as a strengths-based program

Overall, evidence from this case study shows that the WLI's ontological approach to developmental leadership has shaped the ways alumni see themselves as leaders. This includes their individual approaches to leadership, networking, collaboration and supporting others for developmental change. This was succinctly expressed by Ms ToVue:

> *The thing about WLI is it helps you find you, understand you and your leadership capacities, and how you, as a leader, would react to certain situations... It's not changing you. It's not trying to change you. It's about you looking within yourself and finding where you sort of fit in as a leader. (Ms ToVue)*

WLI's approach to ontological leadership, as summarised in Figure 3 focuses on the interactions of language use, emotions and body as a 'way of being' when leading and helping others to flourish. The alumni interviewed exemplify these characteristics as they describe insights into how the experience of being part of WLI has helped them become better developmental leaders through fostering communication skills, confidence, and understanding of self.

Figure 3: WLI's ontological leadership approach (Adapted from www.ontologicalcoaching.com.au, image courtesy of Tony Liston, WLI Ontological Leadership Coach and Facilitator).



One example of how WLI has enabled alumni to use learned communication skills effectively comes from that of Ms Soko, who describes that WLI taught her 'how to read the room and how to speak to a person in a tone that will be diplomatic... (and) teaching me the language to use to get the message.

A growth in confidence through participation in the WLI program was described by all alumni. They noted that all elements of the program work together to provide a leadership skill training, platform, and opportunities for alumni to interact with each other. As expressed by Ms Muavesi:

> *The way it's designed, it boosted my confidence, being around women, being able to share, given the opportunity and the platform to discuss issues.*

Alumni responses demonstrated the strengths-based nature of the WLI program in helping each alumni understand their own unique leadership style and be confident in their capacity to use their leadership skills to enact developmental change. Figure 4 provides an insight into the how the WLI program enhanced leadership development and confidence over time.

Figure 4: Alumni trajectories of leadership growth through WLI



3.2 Continuing networks with fellow scholars, colleagues, and mentors

Expanding on Phase 1 findings where the majority of alumni found the mentoring they received in the WLI program helpful, evidence from the interviews in this study show that access to carefully matched WLI industry mentors further enabled alumni to gain critical technical experience, exposure to new ideas, and industry connections which expanded their professional networks both in Australia and globally.

For example, Ms Delis reflected that being matched with her WLI mentor, who is a gender advisor at the International Women's Developmental Agency (IWDA), has allowed her to better implement gender empowerment initiatives in development programming through continued connection and advice seeking.

Similarly, Ms ToVue remains connected to her WLI mentor and colleagues she met during her internship at the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), actively using her Australian network to support her research work. She noted:

> *I sort of reach out to bounce ideas. Some of the people that I'm still connected with outside of WLI, have been really helpful in supporting me. Recently, I was sort of working on a case study to present in an agriculture food conference in India, and I had really good support from contacts in Australia to help me.*

Both Ms Soko and Ms Muavesi expressed that they continue to receive support from their WLI industry mentors, going back to their mentors 'to seek advice...and (bounce) ideas', or for support to implement projects and initiatives.

3.3 The WLI Sisterhood: Coalitions of Support

Shared experiences of participating in the WLI program have enabled the alumni interviewed to build enduring relationships with their WLI peers based on a shared identity or 'sisterhood'. Unpacking the high levels of network connectivity found in Phase 1, this case study illustrates that these relationships are based on shared values and the desire to improve development outcomes within their local communities, workplaces, sectors and across the Pacific region.

This case study found that these leaders use the WLI sisterhood as a trusted space or network to activate coalitions of support through:

- seeking and providing advice, reassurance, sharing experiences or expertise
- contextual insights, and access to broader connections.

3.3.1 Seeking and providing advice, reassurance, sharing experiences or expertise

Alumni interviewed noted that the WLI network provides alumni a safe space to reach out to each other to seek advice, support, or share expertise with each other. This can be done through the WLI Leaders Hub[4] or organically through the broader WLI alumni network where alumni help empower and encourage, as well as strengthen capacity to overcome challenges in their professional and personal spaces.

Alumni have expressed that they have also been able to support their fellow WLI alumni through providing advice and support due to strong connections and reciprocal relationships established through commonly shared experiences. Below are examples shared by Ms ToVue and Dr Toliman:

> *Every now and again we sort of catch up, or they have something that they want to share with me, or get my views on, sort of reach out. So I'd say that for us, we have a really good connection with the ladies who have been through the WLI (Ms ToVue)*

> *So it's like...being available to people...you don't have to give much encouragement for people to share their problems with you. And their needs. And often it's like I meet for a coffee, and I'm like... So what's happening? Anything I can bless you with? Or I can be of assistance? (Dr Toliman)*

4 The WLI Leaders Hub is an online community for alumni and current participants of WLI to connect and stay engaged with the program. To learn more visit: https://hub.wliprogram.org/page/about

3.3.2 Contextual insights and access to a broader network

Alumni interviewed noted that they often reach out to the broad WLI network to gain contextual insights into new markets or an understanding of what is happening in a particular country or region. Ms ToVue, for example, described that she often reaches out to the broader WLI network while travelling to touch base and 'understand a bit more on... what's happening locally' in her work.

Alumni also link others into their expanded professional networks to help advance projects, careers opportunities, and build capacity of women in the sisterhood. As described by Ms Muavesi:

> *WLI, having all of the contacts, of the other cohorts. So, if there's a need, I can always use that to find one of the areas. Part of our cohort, like the teachers who came, I remember one of the ladies from PNG was a teacher, she needed help with a conference. So, she sent me a message, like, "Can you help me with this, I need to put together a conference program and all of these things?" "Okay, I'll help you." That's because we do meetings all the time, so I was very happy to help her with her conference program.*

3.4 The WLI Sisterhood: Coalitions for Change

Evidence from this case study supports Phase 1 findings showing how alumni have collaborated with their WLI peers to undertake a WLI-related initiative – the WLI Leadership Fund - via coalitions for change. Aside from their common involvement in WLI project work, coalitions for change are also exemplified through their strong network connections as well as supporting others in their leadership journeys to enable collective influence and developmental change.

3.4.1 Alumni collaboration in project work through the WLI Leadership Fund

In 2020, WLI introduced the COVID 19 Leadership Fund (now known as the WLI Leadership Fund) to promote collaboration between WLI alumni during the pandemic on community-based projects in areas such as health, education, safety, agriculture, and food security. Alumni received small grants to contribute to the COVID 19 response. These shared projects enabled WLI alumni to exchange knowledge and expertise, forge friendships and expand networks, while navigating other priorities of work and personal commitments. As best summed by Ms Muavesi,

> *Trying to find a time to come together and work on something together was challenging, but fulfilling in a way, because despite all of the challenges, we managed to implement a project together and to help, I think part of it was really helping the women.*

Four alumni in this case study participated in community-based programs funded by the WLI Leadership Fund which aims to facilitate their leadership skills and strengthen networks through collaboration on development initiatives in country. Brief examples of these are provided below.

Veinanumi project

During the COVID 19 pandemic, Ms Soko, Ms Muavesi and three other Fijian alumni undertook the Veinanumi project to support rural women who had lost their income, tackle menstrual poverty and food security. The project run over two rounds from June to December 2020 and saw the alumni raise money to supply menstrual products, distribute vegetable seeds and work collaboratively with community groups to make reusable sanitary pads for rural communities.

Hands up for Hygiene project

In PNG, Ms Delis and two WLI colleagues ran the 'Hands up for Hygiene' protect over two rounds in 2020. The project helped local primary schools in Port Moresby and West New Britain Province improve hand washing and sanitation during the pandemic through the supply of water tanks. Community groups also got involved with making masks and building a mural.

3.4.2 Using networks for change and supporting others

Alumni also discussed how they have actively used their networks for collaboration and change. For example, Ms Soko noted that she can tap into what is happening across the region through relationships she has made through her network. As a senior government leader, she is now well connected with other WLI alumni in government and works collaboratively behind the scenes to ensure shared development goals. She reflected:

> *Apart from the ladies that I work with here in Fiji with regards to the WLI project we also have a big sisterhood. I mean one of our cohorts is the current ambassador to Fiji from Tuvalu, Ese. Through that network Ese can easily message me on the Sunday, say "Okay, Tuvalu's having this, this, this, can we have some support?" and vice versa. So even though we're all in significant positions, because of the relationship that's been established, we can talk on the side and talk about issues that could assist each other in terms of our work.*

Supporting fellow WLI alumni in their leadership journeys to further facilitate collective reach and influence for change is also a key feature of these coalitions for change. As Dr Toliman shares:

> *It's been so encouraging to see the leadership journey of other women... I'm so proud of them, and I look for opportunities to showcase... the critical mass of women leaders that are offering influence in their networks. And then how those networks overlap and join up.*

3.5 Broader on-award experiences

In addition to the technical skills and knowledge gained on award, alumni noted that on-award experiences such as participation in clubs, social activities, church groups, and interaction with local and international students broaden their mindsets, built their confidence, expanded their intercultural competencies, and expanded their networks. For example, Ms ToVue recalled activating her leadership skills at university to re-establish the International Student Association with a group of friends. She found real camaraderie with other international students which gave her confidence and taught her to be able to 'stand up and lead'.

Ms Muavesi recalled that being one of the few women in the Master of Fisheries Policy, a course dominated by older male naval officers from across the Asia Pacific, gave her confidence and insights into her unique strengths as an environmental lawyer.

> *I came back from studies; my confidence level really grew. Much of that confidence came out from the classroom in the University of Wollongong... I think there was only two or three females... I think being in a room full of older men, learning from them too, that gave me a lot of confidence.*

3.6 Sustainability of networks

It is important to note that alumni highlighted that connections made on award or through the WLI program can wane over time. These women participated in the first three WLI cohorts from 2017 to 2019 and the program has undergone several iterations since that time. These alumni reflected that as older alumni, they wished for continued program level support to sustain connections between women in their set cohorts and across the groups through WLI facilitated networking events, project work and professional development activities.

Several alumni suggested increasing the frequency of networking events including cohort specific 'check ins' to themed based events opened to all cohorts. Dr Toliman suggested increased opportunities to meet with other alumni on relevant local challenges or initiatives. She noted that there needs to be 'sustainable ways that women can get together in country and do things together' so that they don't always need to depend on WLI to facilitate events or activities. Ms Muavesi wanted to reignite old connections through catch up sessions to reconnect and learn about her cohort's recent career trajectories. She noted:

> *I think post-WLI check-in sessions to see where the cohort is. I think it would be great if we were to – even if it was like an online call, where everybody came together and just had an experience sharing of where you're at now, from when you were then. That would be great.*

Ms Soko suggested expanding the networking events to include the broader Australia Awards leaders network and open it up to influential 'women leaders within the Pacific' to help expand collaboration and networking across the region.

Alumni interviewed stated that they wished there was ongoing funding for successful projects to continue to collaborate on with other WLI alumni over time instead of being limited to one or two rounds of funding. These projects lost momentum once funding ran out and could have been passed on to newer cohorts to help build and sustain networks. Alumni interviewed for this case study were unaware that they could now apply for further financial support under the Leadership Fund to continue their earlier work.

Access to ongoing professional development activities were also seen by alumni as a way for WLI alumni to sustain connections, increase employability and improve leadership skills. Several alumni wanted access to bespoke training workshops with other Australia Awards alumni to improve cross pollination of coalitions across groups and improve their technical skills. WLI are currently planning to use alumni representatives in Fiji, PNG and Samoa to act as focal points to help determine training needs of alumni moving forward so that these events can best cater for labour market gaps and alumni at different stages of their careers.

4. Enablers and barriers to developmental change

The chapter explores the enabler and barriers that alumni experience in their contexts. These enablers and barriers, located outside of AA and the WLI program, have impacted alumni leadership momentum and their capacity to activate their leadership skill for developmental change.

4.1 Enablers

Alumni identified several common enabling factors which provided them the right mindset and personal space to pursue their leadership activities and support others. These enablers include personal attributes, faith and a conviction for public service and strong family support.

4.1.1 Personal attributes

A key enabling factor among the alumni is their strong drive and tenacity to enact change and improve outcomes both in their workplaces and communities. As leaders they are highly invested and passionate about the work they are involved in and supportive of others who are working to improve the lives of others.

For example, Ms Soko noted that she thrives on challenge and driven to make a difference, especially as a woman in a male-dominated field. She recently coordinated a regional disaster preparedness exercise and was warned that her organisation's plans were 'overambitious' because it planned to engage with 14 other Pacific Island countries in the exercises.

> *That word, 'overambitious', was enough to ignite that fire in me to fight it beyond and above it to make it happen... and it did, and we executed it, and we brought 14 other Pacific Island countries with us as part of the exercise. That had never been done in the Pacific [before] let alone Fiji.*

4.1.2 Faith and service through community work

Another common enabler identified by alumni was their religious beliefs and sense of community service which motivated them to be agents for change in their workplaces and local communities.

> *I'm a Christian...And it makes up a huge part of my self-identity, and how I do the things I do. It's coming from a framework of knowing that I'm a daughter of the most high God... and that my life's work is to glorify him. (Dr Toliman)*

All alumni interviewed were also actively involved in their local communities, taking leadership roles in their churches or volunteering within the community. This everyday developmental leadership is helping to improve grassroots development outcomes in a range of areas including social justice, environmental conservation and waste management, and financial literacy.

For example, Ms Muavesi co-leads the Caritas Commission with her sister at her local church. The group is part of the humanitarian arm of the Catholic church, and they are committed to improving social and ecological justice. In response to waste at public events at the church, they bought in recycling and waste management into all church functions. Ms Muavesi noted:

> *We created something that people are now doing and following. So, we now see people, doing [waste] separation, we have garbage bags there every time we have an event in church. Now people are fighting over the plastic to take back and wash. I think those are the little things that people don't understand about plastic food packs. It's always easier for us to buy it, use it and throw away. But it can really be reused.*

Dr Toliman runs a financial mentoring program for people in her community, helping to address financial literacy and the high level of debt among young people in PNG by getting them to look at their spending.

> *Basically, it's about money mindfulness... It's community [work] and it's completely outside of health. But it's all related, because if you don't correct people's money [problems], how they going to improve their health? Like they're so stressed. And there's nothing that is being done in this country for mental health. And how money actually stresses people out and affects their decisions, their wellbeing. So, the goal of this money program is not just financial freedom, it's peace.*

4.1.3 Family support

All alumni interviewed noted that strong support from their partners and their extended families has been crucial in their ability to take up and sustain leadership activities both in the workplace and the community. Ms Soko noted that Pacific women leaders are 'fortunate and blessed' to be able to access the support of the extended family. Many of the women noted that they have intergenerational support in the home which enables them greater capacity to take on senior roles.

In addition, alumni also noted the ongoing support of their husbands has enabled them to 'thrive' and take on additional responsibilities, travel away from the family and put in long hours to lead change. They reflected on the importance of partnership and shared family goals as giving them capacity or space to grow as a leader and accept greater responsibility.

Ms Muavesi exemplified many of the alumni's sentiments when she reflected on the importance of having a strong partnership with her husband which 'mitigates challenges' of being away from the family through shared family responsibility and 'understanding that my success is his success, and our family's success.'

4.2 Barriers

Alumni identified several barriers and challenges that affected their ability to actualise their leadership skills and change-agency on their return from award. These included underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within their context, workplace structures such as hierarchical organisational systems and reduced promotional opportunities, and limited employment opportunities for those returning to the job market.

4.2.1 Women's underrepresentation in leadership

Pacific women have the lowest level of political representation in the world and remain 'under-represented at senior levels of the public sector and private sector organisations' (Howard, 2019. pg 8). Alumni in this case study identified the underrepresentation of women leaders in senior public facing roles as acting as both a barrier to leadership opportunities and a challenge when leading developmental change.

Alumni noted that as female leaders they have faced 'animosity' from both male and female colleagues when taking leadership roles, especially if they are the first women in that organisation to do so. Alumni cited the challenges around being a 'role model' and the pressure to perform at a higher level than their male counterparts. Ms Soko reflected:

> *You just need to go 100 miles before the men because you're always being perceived as a woman. Unless and until you make something different and you put your foot on the ground, [and] say this is an area that women can also work in. That's something that – for me it keeps me [going] – it's one of the areas where I try and push myself as well because I know I'm not only doing it for me, I'm doing it for the women that will come after me.*

4.2.2 Limitations to advancement

As noted in previous GTF case studies and by research undertaken by the Australian National University on behalf of WLI (Lovai et al., 2022.), a common challenge experienced by alumni reintegrating back into their workplaces post award is the lack of career advancement and a resistance to change from colleagues and senior leaders.

Alumni in this case study stated that their post award expectations of leadership and their agency to enact change did not always match their existing organisational systems and processes. Alumni noted that organisational structures such as hierarchical reporting lines and 'bureaucracy' hampered their ability to actuate their leadership through limited opportunities to contribute to change or be promoted after already being seen as having received the opportunity to study abroad.

Several alumni who returned to their substantive roles noted that they faced 'suspicion' and 'resistance to change' from colleagues and employers which was disheartening and slowed their leadership momentum. One alum noted, 'it's very hard when you reinsert yourself back. You come with a degree and people just think, "Oh, she now thinks she knows everything."'

These alumni noted that they had to spend time to 'rebuild relationships', and 'trust' with colleagues and 'prove' their new leadership and technical credentials with senior management before they could enact change.

4.2.3 Unemployment due to a labour market mismatch

Another challenge, also identified in other GTF research, was the lack of suitable employment opportunities on return from scholarship for those alumni who had to resign their positions to go on award. These women cited that they returned home to limited job opportunities in their fields due to a mismatch of their new qualifications and the immaturity of the labour market.

These alumni 'struggled' to find work on their return and found that they were often seen 'overqualified' by potential employers who did not see the value in master level qualifications. Alumni noted that this had a negative impact on their career and leadership momentum.

These alumni noted that months of unemployment were 'depressing' and weakened their self-confidence. One alumna summed it up best when she stated that the 'flipside' to the benefits of the scholarship is the potential harm of training people for jobs that just don't exist. She reflected:

> *I felt so empowered when I went up on that podium to get my masters. As soon as I returned home, I couldn't put that masters on paper and apply for a job. Because I felt I was overqualified... And that hit me so hard.*

5. Conclusion and implications for AA/WLI

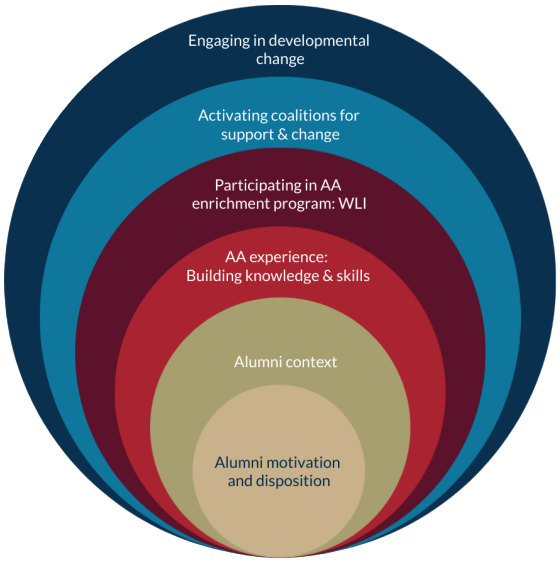
The findings from the alumni interviews in this case study reinforce the long-term, positive impact on networking outcomes of the Australia Awards that have consistently been found in GTF SNA case studies. On-award leadership programs such as WLI, encourage collaboration on collective goals that are especially important for increasing cohesion across a group of alumni and strengthening the Australia Award networking objectives. This is exemplified by the high level of connectivity found between WLI alumni in Phase 1 of the research into this enrichment program (the SNA case study). Further exploration into these connections through in-depth interviews in Phase 2 show conclusively that alumni are actively using their WLI connections to support their professional development and contribute to development in the Pacific. Alumni used these networks with shared purpose to drive sustainable change at the community, organisational, and societal level. These alumni identify that the Australia Awards and WLI equipped them with the skills and confidence for developmental leadership. Figure 5 below summarises the influence of Australia Awards and the WLI experience on women's leadership and developmental change.

Figure 5: WLI alumni and their contributions to sustainable development

Factors influencing WLI alumni contributions to development

WLI aims to teach alumni how to use all factors to build developmental leadership, confidence, and connections to drive change





Factors	Examples
Engaging in developmental change	◦ Improved health outcomes for women and girls ◦ Environmental protection and sustainability ◦ Disaster management and preparedness ◦ Food security and economic prosperity ◦ Improved education
Activating coalitions for support & change	Tapping into WLI alumnae expertise for: ◦ context ◦ technical expertise ◦ social capital, additional connections ◦ mentoring ◦ 'sisterhood', shared identity, camaraderie
Participating in Australia Awards on-award enrichment: Women Leading & Influencing (WLI)	◦ Leadership skills and behaviours ◦ Confidence ◦ Self-reflection ◦ Networking and connections
Australia Awards experience: building knowledge and skills	◦ Technical knowledge ◦ Networking ◦ Changing world view ◦ Confidence
Alumni context	◦ Culture ◦ Workplace ◦ Community connections ◦ Family

Enablers to developmental leadership:
- relationship building
- trust and connections
- shared experience
- collaborating
- confidence in leadership

Barriers to developmental leadership:
- women's under-representation
- limitations to advancement
- unemployment due to skills mismatch

This case study has found that these WLI alumni, who were nominated by their peers as strong, visible leaders in Phase 1, are driving developmental change in their workplaces and in their local communities through utilising their unique technical skills and knowledge, and taking 'relational and collective' (Jackson, et.al. 2022) approaches to developmental leadership in their communities.

The case study identified that these WLI leaders were driving change through:

- connecting others
- building and maintaining authentic relationships
- collaboration, organisational leadership and technical expertise, and
- gender representation.

These women are making significant contribution to development through everyday leadership in their communities through volunteering, and in their professional careers in areas such as environmental law and conservation, disaster management and preparedness, health research and health policy, education and development initiatives, food security and prosperity.

These contributions clearly demonstrate the achievement of Australia Awards long-term Program Outcome 1: Alumni are using their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.

Figure 6: WLI alumni and their contributions to sustainable development



The study found that participation in the WLI enrichment activities provided alumni with increased confidence in their technical and leadership skills and gave them access to expanded networks through connections to fellow scholars, classmates, Australian mentors and industry contacts. Alumni continued to cultivate these relationships which have formed strong coalitions of support to enable them to effectively drive change within their context.

Ongoing alumni support from WLI through initiatives such as the Leaders Hub, access to ontological leadership coaching, and project experience through the Leadership Fund has also continued to strengthen alumni's leadership capacity and networking reach.

Of particular interest, the study shows strong evidence that these alumni use the shared experience of the WLI program to activate coalitions of support and change through their WLI 'sisterhood' which acts as a safe and trusted network to seek advice and reassurance, share expertise and experiences, gain contextual insights and access additional professional connections from like-minded women in the Pacific.

These findings demonstrate that these alumni are achieving Australia Awards long-term Program Outcome 2: contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

5.1 Implications for the Australia Awards

The interview data collected in this study, and the data from the linked SNA study of WLI alumni show that that enrichment programs such as WLI play an important role in building leadership capacity and professional networks of emerging leaders. GTF data from previous studies also provide evidence to suggest that enrichment programs add value to the Australia Awards experience through strengthening the alumni's understanding of their role as change makers, and the importance of using their technical expertise and networks to support and drive developmental change (see Doyle & Edwards, 2022).

Evidence also shows that there is a strong shared identity or 'sisterhood' which has developed through the WLI program. Alumni continue to use their strong connections to support each other professionally and personally.

While the barriers (not dissimilar to previous GTF research) identified by alumni slowed their leadership momentum and change-agency on their return from award, the recommendations that follow highlight the multi-level (e.g. individual, program, regional, award) opportunities afforded to WLI alumni that enhanced their Australia Award experience and supported and enabled their capacity to facilitate developmental change. Some recommendations that could enhance other, future enrichment initiatives and leadership training beyond the core Australia Awards degree are:

- Embedding intentional networking activities on award such as industry specific mentoring, networking events, work placements, and engagement activities to facilitate connections and build awareness of the importance of coalitions to support and drive developmental change.
- Strengthening alumni understanding of their role as change makers through ontological leadership training on award to build confidence in their technical and leadership skills.
- Facilitating a sense of shared identity and camaraderie among alumni through targeted, theme-based engagement, mentoring and expertise exchange post award via online forums, events, and the establishment of communities of practice.
- Providing post award support for the transition back into the workforce through access to funded professional development opportunities, internships, and local or regionally based mentors.
- Provision of targeted funding for collaborative project work between AA alumni to support ongoing capacity building in their local communities through Alumni Grants and regional alumni activities such as workshops or projects.

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7. Acronyms and Abbreviations

AA	Australia Awards
ACER	Australian Council for Education Research
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DLP	Developmental Leadership Program
GTF	Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNG AAA	Papua New Guinea Australian Alumni Association
SNA	Social Network Analysis
WLI	Women Leading and Influencing

Appendix 1: Survey instrument and limitations

Interview instrument

The following are sets of questions with introductory and segue text for WLI alumni:

Section	Questions
Introducing the research/checklist	• Confirm understanding of project and consent. • Outline research process – interview, transcription, review of report sections directly referencing the participant • Interview has 11 questions to go through with time at the end for participant to share anything else • Request permission to record – only listened to by the transcriber and research team
Personal information	1. Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself? We are interested in what you do (current position and organisation), and the qualification you completed as part of your Australia Awards scholarship?
Leadership skills **Outcome 1: Alumni use their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development** RQ: What is the added value of participation in WLI over and above the Australia Awards experience?	In the phase 1 of our research, you were identified as well-connected and actively using leadership skills by your WLI peers. 2. Why do you think you were identified as a well- connected leader? *(Prompt: Could this be related to your work or position in the community? Could this be related to you as a person?)*
	3. How has the skills and knowledge you developed on award and participating in the WLI program shaped your ability to be a leader to contribute to developmental change at work or in your community? Please provide examples. (More confidence, more strategic)
	4. What have been the challenges or barriers you have faced in contributing to developmental change in your work or community since returning from award? *(Prompt: in your work – lack of opportunities, workplace structure,)* 5. How have you used your WLI leadership skills and networks to support you to make change and overcome barriers? **(LTO 1&2)**

Section	Questions
Outcome 2: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.	In the phase 1 of our research, we observed connections across cohorts and countries among WLI participants. 6. What kinds of new relationships and connections have you made because of being part of WLI? (*Prompt different types of connections e.g. other WLI participants and alumni, more experienced leaders, people working in organisations related to leadership aspirations etc).* a. What benefit or value do you think you get from these different relationships and networks? What benefits do you think you might get from them in the future?
	2. Can you share with us how your relationships with your WLI peers from cohorts 1-3 have helped you in your work or community? *(Prompt: Would you mind giving us some examples of how these connections have helped you in your work/ community?)*
	3. Can you give me an example of a time when you have used an Australian relationship or connection you have made through your WLI experience to enact change? How do you think you could use your Australian relationships and connections in the future?
	4. How do you maintain your relationships and networks? (Prompt re: ways of staying connected e.g. regular informal meetings, messages on social media etc)
	5. Thinking about your leadership skills, can you describe an achievement that you are most proud of, in your work or community? 6. Are there any recommendations or comments you could help to improve WLI and enhance leadership and networks in your context? That covers our questions today, is there anything you would like to add? ***Follow-ups:*** *If required, CV/Bio, and photograph.*

Limitations to the case study

The GTF worked with local researchers based in PNG and Fiji to collect data. GTF researchers supported data collection in person in Fiji but were unable to do so in PNG due to security concerns. There are several limitations of this research that were inherent to both the nature of the research and the research process. A limitation of the nature of semi structured interviews can be a lack of follow up prompts used across different researchers in different contexts which may have shaped the way the conversation progressed.

It is also likely that the WLI alumni in this case study may have had a positive bias towards their on-award and WLI experiences and outcomes. The GTF has developed interview questions and analysis approaches to reduce the impact of this bias—these are applied consistently across all case studies. Through this approach, leading questions are avoided, and participants are offered opportunities to reflect on their outcomes at the beginning and at the end of the interview without specific questions to guide their answers. Participants were also made aware of the strict research capacity of the GTF and its role in providing evidence of outcomes to DFAT.