Australia Awards

Global Tracer Facility

Policy Brief –Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: WLI alumnae reflections and insights

About the Case Study

Alumni focus:	Australia Awards alumnae that participated in the enrichment program Women Leading and Influencing (WLI), focus on Cohorts 1-3 (2017 to 2019)
Study design:	The GTF conducted a sequential mixed-methods analysis of the long-term impact of the WLI program on developmental leadership in the Pacific. Phase 1: Social network analysis (SNA) of the WLI Cohorts 1-3 connections Phase 2: Case study, in-depth interviews with five nominated leaders identified in Phase 1
Key outputs:	Reports – Phase 1: *Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: Cultivating networks for change in Australia Award WLI alumni* https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/people-people/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility-year-8-results Phase 2: *Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: WLI alumnae reflections and insights* https://www.dfat. gov.au/people-to-people/australia-awards/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility-year-8- results

Overview

In Year 8, the GTF conducted an innovative sequential mixed-methods analysis of the Australia Awards enrichment program Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) to explore developmental leadership among alumnae in the Pacific.

The WLI program is a high-profile initiative designed to support Australia Awards alumni from the Pacific build their developmental leadership skills through on-award and reintegration enrichment activities designed to foster their own unique leadership style and build local and regional connections to drive developmental change.

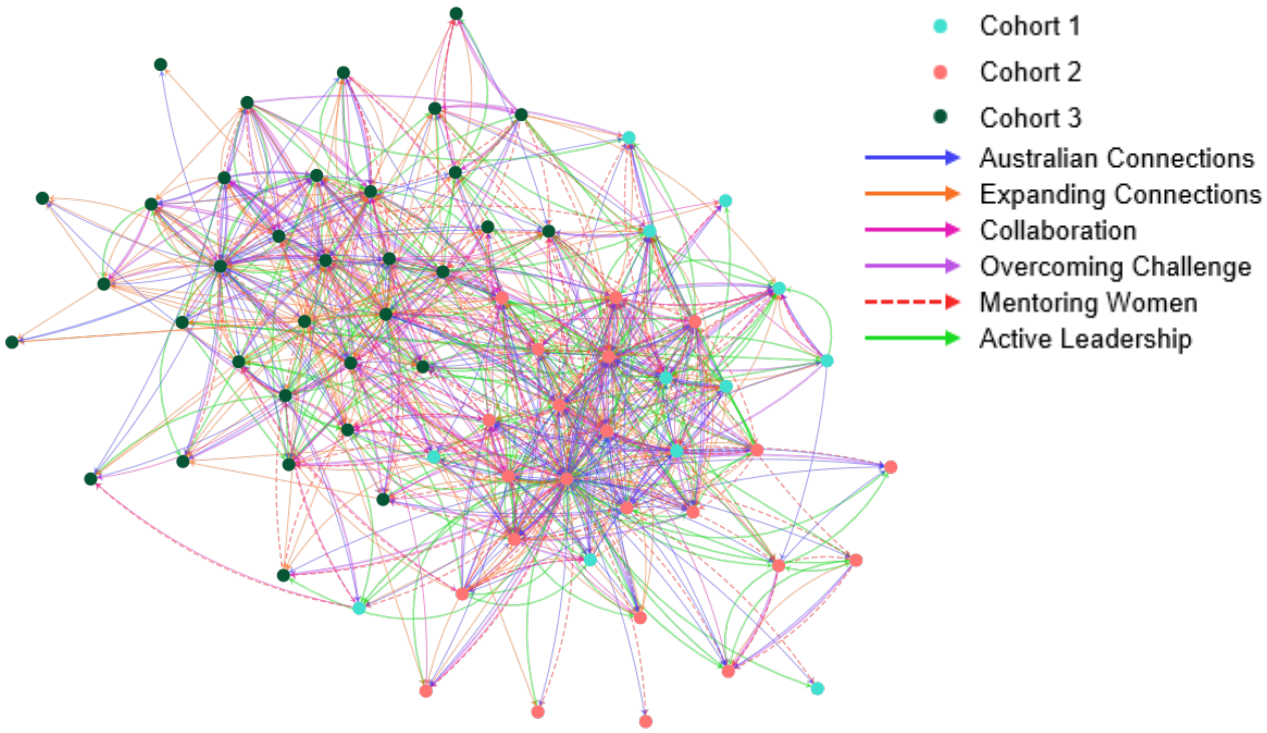
The overall aim of the research was to use Social Network Analysis (SNA) to explore alumni networks between these leading women in the Pacific, identify key network members exhibiting developmental leadership characteristics and then use in-depth interviews to understand how these key network members were using their developmental leadership skills to drive change. Below is an outline of the two phases of the research, which were delivered as two separate research case studies.



Key findings

In Phase 1, the Social Network Analysis (SNA) demonstrated that WLI alumnae from Cohorts 1-3 were highly connected and used their networks with WLI peers to form **coalitions for change and support** to drive **developmental change** in their contexts. The GTF worked in partnership with WLI to engage alumnae in the research, resulting in 81 per cent of the alumni responding to the survey.

All 69 alumnae from Cohorts 1 to 3 were part of a relationship in the Australian Connections network, either reporting that they would contact a WLI alum and/or would be contacted by a WLI alum to develop connections with Australia. The large majority of WLI alumni (83%) were also part of a collaborative relationship with a WLI peer, illustrating their motivation to work collectively to enact sustainable change in their contexts.



Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by cohort

Across WLI Cohorts 1-3, 12 alumni were identified through SNA as key network members, either due to their structural position in the professional support networks (the brokers) or because they were highly regarded by their WLI peers as exhibiting developmental leadership characteristics (the leaders). Using SNA to identify brokers and leaders within alumni networks can support the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards program. For instance, individuals that hold broker roles can be the focus of information campaigns designed to improve alumni engagement as this will ensure that information spreads effectively to all network members. Knowing who the network leaders are for an alumni group is also useful for the Australia Awards when considering the recruitment of new mentors for future alumni and for targeted professional development programs.

In Phase 2, the GTF investigated how 5 of the 12 key network members identified in Phase 1 were using their leadership skills to drive change and how their Australia Awards and WLI experiences contributed to their developmental leadership capacity. Three of the 5 women were from Papua New Guinea and two were from Fiji. The GTF worked closely with local researchers to gain a more nuanced contextual understanding of female leadership in Fiji and PNG. See below brief alumni bios.

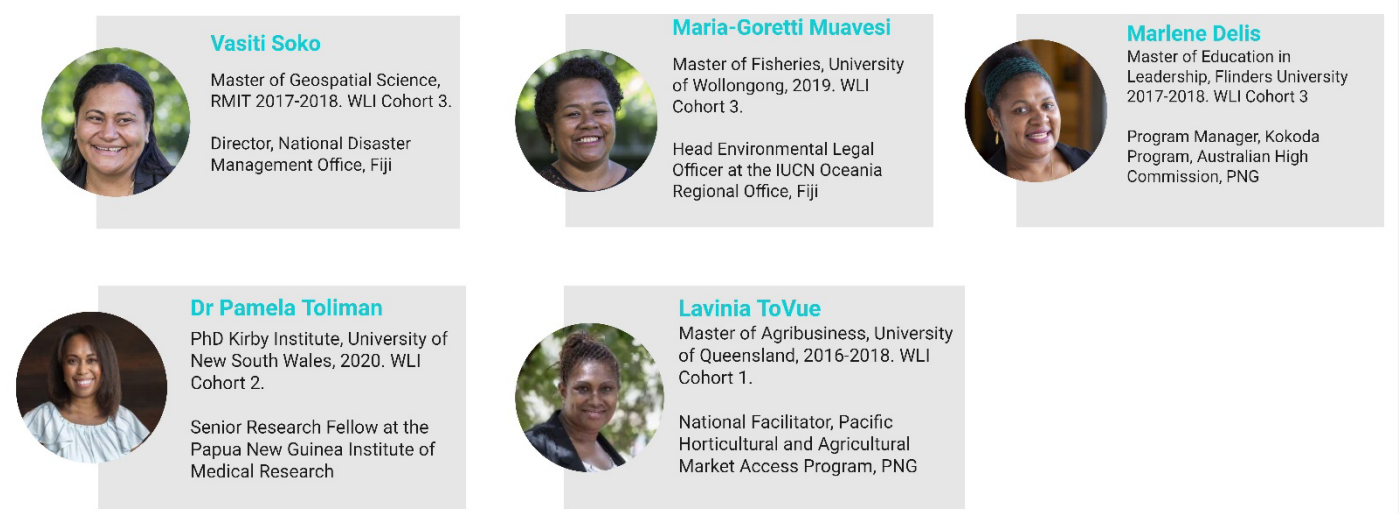


Figure 1: Phase 2: WLI alumnae interview participants

The research found that these key network members were **highly connected**, **visible change makers** who were driving change by connecting others, building and maintaining authentic relationships, through intentional collaboration, organisational leadership and technical expertise, and through empowering those around them.

When asked to reflect on why they were nominated by their peers as key network members in Phase 1, alumnae believed that this was due to being 'genuine' 'effective' communicators, 'willing to share', 'well connected' and 'in a role that facilitates networking'.

Impact of the Australia Awards and WLI experiences

The research found that these key network members reported that participation in on award activities and the WLI ontological leadership training provided them 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.

Of particular interest, the research shows strong evidence that these alumnae 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.

As exemplar WLI leaders, 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.



Figure 2. WLI alumnae and their contributions to sustainable development

Implications for the Australia Awards

These two case studies demonstrate that enrichment programs such as WLI play an important role in building leadership capacity and professional networks of emerging leaders.

- 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.
- The high level of connectivity found between WLI alumnae in Phase 1 and further explored through in-depth interviews in Phase 2 show conclusively that alumnae are actively using their WLI connections to support their professional development and contribute to development in the Pacific.
- Evidence also shows that there is a strong shared identity or 'sisterhood' which has developed through the WLI program. Alumnae continue to use their strong connections to support each other professionally and personally.
- Alumnae used these networks with shared purpose to drive sustainable change at the community, organisational, and societal level.
- These alumnae identify that the Australia Awards and WLI equipped them with the skills and confidence for developmental leadership. Figure 3 below summarises the influence of Australia Awards and the WLI experience on women's leadership and developmental change.

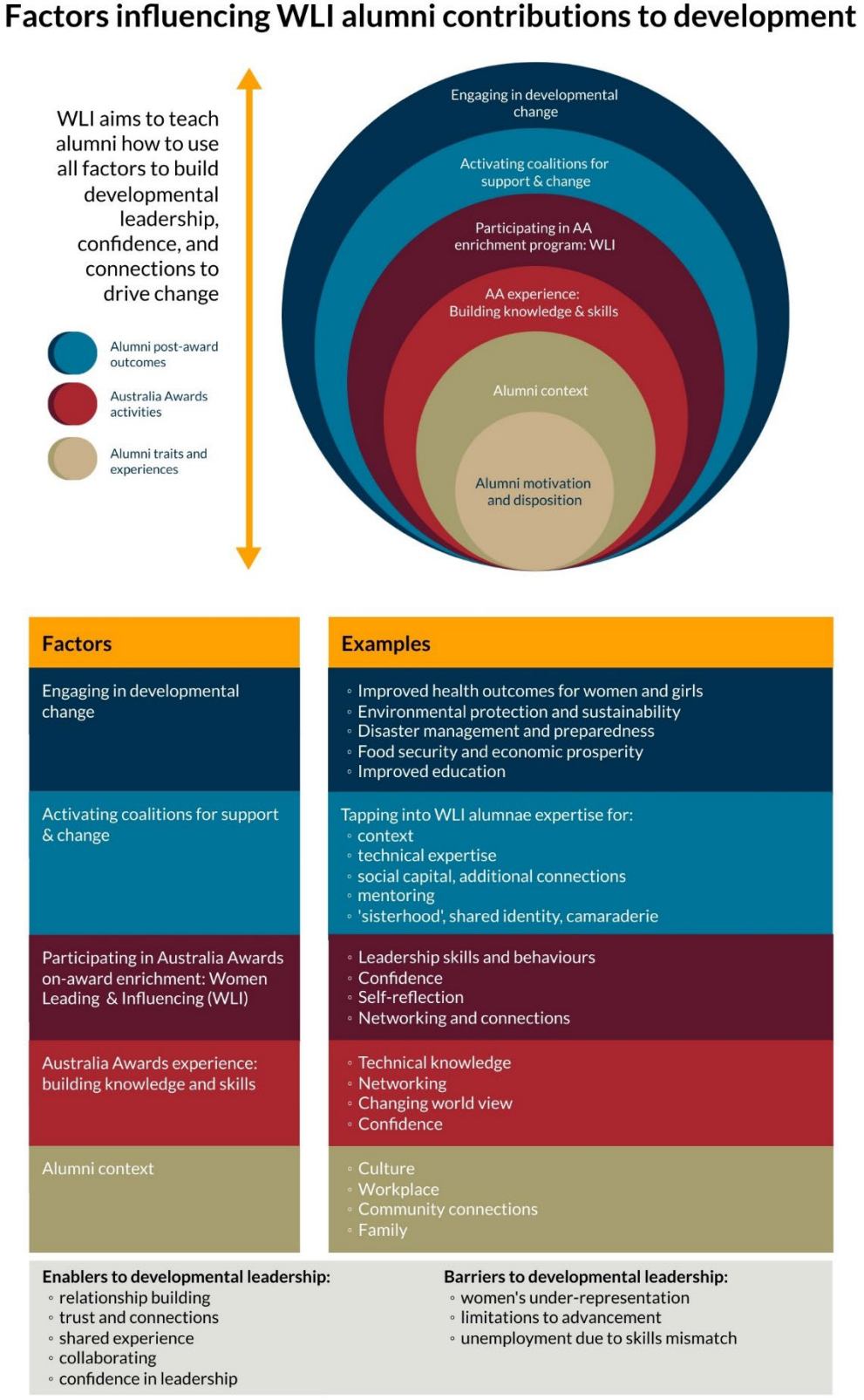


Figure 3. The influence of the Australia Award and WLI experience on developmental change

While the barriers (not dissimilar to previous GTF research) identified by alumnae slowed their leadership momentum and change-agency on their return from award, the recommendations that follow suggest multi-level (e.g. individual, program, regional, award) engagement of alumnae to support and enable developmental change. Given the strong impact of WLI on the facilitation of coalitions of support and change, some recommendations that could enhance future programming and expand the reach and influence of Australia Awards and WLI alumnae in the Pacific are:

- Maintaining and supporting professional learning activities post award, targeting job-seeking and employability skills.
- Increasing opportunities for WLI alumnae to link into the broader AA alumni network for mentoring and expertise exchange.
- Expanding opportunities for continued alumni engagement or re-engagement across WLI and AA cohorts on specific themes to build and strengthen coalitions for support and change across the Pacific.
- Further funding targeted at collaborative project work between WLI alumnae to support ongoing capacity building in their local communities.

Annex: Infographic Phase 1- Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: Cultivating networks for change in Australia Award WLI alumni

Australia Awards
Global Tracer Facility

Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: Cultivating networks for change in Australia Award WLI alumni

This case study used social network analysis to examine the long-term impact of the Australia Awards and an on-award enrichment program, the Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) program.

- All alumni in Cohorts 1-3 of the program developed new connections with WLI peers during their participation in the WLI program.
- All alumni were part of a connection with a WLI peer that they used to build ties with Australia and Australian organisations.
- The large majority of alumni were also part of a **collaborative relationship**, demonstrating they had worked with WLI peers after becoming involved in the program. This illustrates alumni's motivation to work collectively to enact sustainable change in their contexts.
- Most alumni believed the **program enhanced their Australia Awards scholarship experience** and had clear aspirations and strategies about how they want to lead and influence change.

The strong and cohesive nature of connections between WLI alumni highlight that this on-award enrichment program and the Australia Awards cultivated **coalitions for change** and **coalitions for support** within this group of women leaders in the Pacific.

Leaders and Brokers

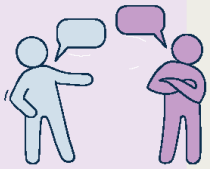
The case study identified **8 leaders and 4 brokers** as key members of the network.

Leader



Highly connected and recognised by their peers as exhibiting developmental leadership skills.
Future initiatives looking to engage Pacific mentors or provide targeted professional development could focus on working with these women who are highly regarded in the region.

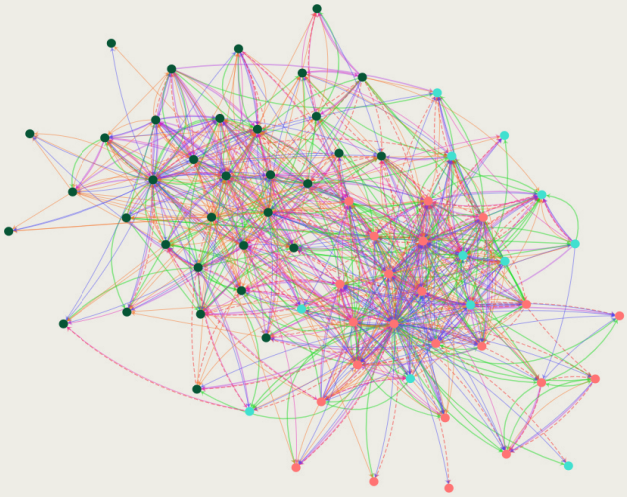
Broker



Members of the cohort that have important positions in the network by influencing the flow of information.
Program engagement initiatives can target brokers whose position in a network means they can facilitate the effective spread of information to all members of a network.

A network map of alumni

Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by cohort.



- Cohort 1
- Cohort 2
- Cohort 3
- Australian Connections
- Expanding Connections
- Collaboration
- Overcoming Challenge
- Mentoring Women
- Active Leadership

Case study participants:
56 women who were part of the Women Leading and Influencing program in cohorts 1-3

