



Australia Awards

Australia Awards

South Asia & Mongolia

Australian Professional Opportunity on
Leading for Women's Economic
Empowerment (regional)

Concept Note

September 2021



Introduction

Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs) are a new addition to the Australia Awards South Asia & Mongolia Program, introduced in February 2021. APOs are delivered as short-term, flexible mechanisms to support Australia's [COVID-19 Development Response Plan](#) which aims to empower women in the region through health security, stability and economic recovery development and humanitarian programs.

Context

Women in South Asia participate in just over 30 percent of the region's labour force, that's less than half the percentage of women in neighbouring ASEAN countries, and the lowest participation rate in the world¹. Women are also more likely to be involved in informal work making them more vulnerable than their male counterparts during times of economic uncertainty such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Accessing safe and decent work can provide women with the opportunity to make and act on economic decisions and share economic benefit and it's not only the "right" thing to do, it's the "smart" thing to do for human development, inclusive growth and business².

The areas that the pandemic has had the greatest economic impact on are those at the heart of gender inequality, including lower wages, fewer educational opportunities, limited access to finance, reliance on informal employment, and social constraints³.

A study by the Asia Foundation⁴ found that across South Asia, women have faced common challenges since the pandemic began, including job losses, falls in income levels, business contraction, financial losses and vulnerabilities and a loss in business for women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

During the first (COVID-19) lockdown in India, only 19 percent of working women kept their jobs and 47 percent suffered permanent job loss this compared with 61 and 7 percent respectively, for their male counterparts⁵.

The adverse impacts of COVID-19 on gender equality have seen correlated impacts on South Asia's economy. Prior to COVID-19, South Asia stood to gain an additional 15 percent in gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025 by increasing women's participation in the labour force and the globally economy stood to gain US\$28 trillion a year. The World Economic Forum is now predicting it could take the region 195 years to reach gender equality, two generations (59 years) more than the global average and since the pandemic began⁶.

¹ World Economic Forum (2021) Global Gender Gap Report 2021: Insight Report March 2021, World Economic Forum.

² UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment n.d. *Goals and Principles*, viewed 26 July 2021, <[About: Goals and principles | UN Women – UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment](#)>.

³ World Trade Organization (2020) The Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Vulnerable Sectors and Economies, World Trade Organization.

⁴ Asia Foundation (2021), COVID & The New Normal for Women in the Economy in South Asia, Asia Foundation.

⁵ Azim Premji University (2021) State of Working India 2021: One year of Covid-19, Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University

⁶ Woetzel J et al., McKinsey Global Institute, April 2018 'The power or parity: Advancing women's equality in Asia Pacific' <<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-asia-pacific>>.

Purpose

This activity aims to build the capabilities of up to 20 participants to understand and address the diverse barriers women face in accessing decent and safe work.

The proposed APO will explore a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment, recognising that creating safe and decent work environment requires governments, businesses and communities to work in partnership to address intersectional systemic barriers.

The proposed APO uses the UN Women's Empowerment Principles as its foundation. The APO will also provide opportunities for linkages and learnings between participants and Australian and regionally organisations and coaches.

Challenges and lessons learnt from this activity could form the basis of a multi-country Short Course in financial year 2022 - 2023.

Objectives

Participants will gain:

- an understanding of modern-day slavery; gender responsive supply chains; linking gender-based violence and women's health rights to women's economic empowerment programming; addressing the burden of unpaid care work; the role of governments in providing gender sensitive social safety nets; and the UN Women and UN Global Compact's Women's Empowerment Principles (grounded in the recognition that businesses have a stake in and responsibility for gender equality and women's empowerment).
- skills in identifying harmful gendered norms-change and planning norm change campaigns.
- confidence and skills to step into leadership roles for women's economic empowerment.
- coaching support and linkages with leading gender specialists from Australia and the region

Course Structure

Proposed delivery methodology:

The activity comprises six, 3-hour webinars over a 10-weeks period. Small group coaching support during week's 5 - 8 will be delivered by a team of Australian based coaches working in partnership with in-country based coaches (preferably Australia Awards alumni).

The course content will be delivered as follows:

- Weeks 1 to 4: one webinar per week,
- Week 5: small group coaching support to apply learnings and skills from webinars 1 to 4,
- Christmas period (3 weeks) – small group independent action learning and research
- Week 6 to 8: small group coaching support to apply learnings and skills from webinars 1 to 4,
- Week 9: webinar 5 – presentations by 50% participants on applied learnings and skills generated from Webinars 1 to 4 and coaching support,

- Week 10: webinar 6 – presentations by 50% participants of applied learnings and skills generated from Webinars 1 to 4 and coaching support.

Participants

This APO will be offered to 20 female participants. Participants will be early to mid-level professionals from government (Ministry of Women and Gender etc.), private sector and civil society.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

The Australian Government's 'Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy' highlights women's economic empowerment as a key priority area the Government's work to promote gender equality.

The development policy, *Partnerships for Recovery- Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* reaffirms a focus on the most vulnerable, including the empowerment of women and girls.

The Australian Government and the Australia Awards - South Asia & Mongolia Program are committed to people from all backgrounds benefitting from our interventions, and to avoid exacerbating inequalities. Through the participation of women of diverse ethnicity, ability/disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions and sex characteristics in this activity, we are enhancing their voices in decision making and leadership.

Key Dates

15 November to 17 December 2021	Weeks 1 to 4 of webinar training
20 December 2021	Week 5 small group coaching session
24 December to 14 January	Small group independent action learning and research
17 January 2022	Week 6 small group coaching
24 January 2022	Week 7 small group coaching
31 January 2022	Week 8 small group coaching
7 February 2022	Week 9 presentations
14 February 2022	Week 10 presentations (final week).

