



Australian Government

# Australian Volunteers

FOR INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

**\$37.4M**

Government & civil society



Education



Health



Social infrastructure & services



Service industries



Agriculture



Environment protection



# Australian Volunteers Program July 2017 – June 2018

The Australian Volunteers Program matches skilled Australians with organisations in developing countries to help these organisations to deliver on their own objectives. Over the past 12 months, 1002 Australian volunteers have worked with 695 partner organisations in 26 countries.

The Australian Volunteers Program builds on more than 60 years' of Australian Government investment in international volunteering, replacing the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program which ended on 31 December 2017. The new program retains the core elements of AVID with the aim of enhancing the program's reach, visibility, impact and value for money.

The first six months focused on scaling up operations and preparing for the transition of volunteers and partners from AVID. The second six months included a focus on mobilising the first cohort of over 200 new volunteers, and developing the essential strategic foundations for the next five years of the program.

Over the next five years, the Australian Volunteers Program aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- » Partner organisations are supported by Australia to achieve their own development objectives
- » Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally
- » The public in Australia better appreciate the value of volunteering

Since the commencement of the Australian Volunteers Program<sup>1</sup>, 99% of partner organisations reported that they are satisfied with the program. They also reported being effectively supported by volunteers to build staff skills, strengthen systems, and build networks and relationships. In addition to supporting their partner organisations, volunteers reported gaining personal and professional skills, and 96% of volunteers were satisfied with support provided by the program.

While all volunteer assignments include objectives relating to the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, inclusion of people with disabilities, inclusion of marginalised groups, and child protection and safeguarding<sup>2</sup>, some assignments have these issues as their primary focus. For the period January to June 2018:

- » 22% of assignments focused on the empowerment of women and girls
- » 15% focused on working with marginalised groups
- » 14% focused on working with people with disabilities
- » 4% focused on child protection and safeguarding

To ensure strategic alignment with the Australian Government's aid priorities, the program developed 22 Country Program Plans to identify priority sectors and partner organisations in each country (22 plans covering 26 countries<sup>3</sup>).

The program also developed a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF). As part of the MELF, the program commissioned two research projects: one on the diversity and inclusion of volunteers and the other on Australians' perceptions of international volunteering. This research provides evidence and baselines and will help guide our efforts in diversity and inclusion, and public diplomacy.

The Australian Volunteers Program is an Australian Government initiative. The program is managed by AVI, in consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd and the Whitelum Group. It is a five-year program with an estimated total budget of AUD\$190 million.

1. From 1 January – 30 June 2018.

2. All non-government partner organisations are required to have a DFAT compliant child protection policy.

3. North Pacific covers 3 countries (Palau, Republic Marshall Islands, FSM); Southern Africa covers 3 countries (South Africa, eSwatini and Lesotho).

## The Australian Volunteers Program is guided by principles that ensure we:



Value volunteering



Support locally-led capacity development



Build strong relationships and partnerships



Evolve best practice and embrace innovation



Enhance diversity and inclusion



Ensure accountability and value learning

# SRI LANKA COUNTRY REPORT

JANUARY – JUNE 2018

## Overview of volunteers

7

Number of  
assignments<sup>1</sup>

7

Number of  
volunteers

4

Commenced  
July – December 2017

0

Commenced  
January – June 2018

### About the Sri Lanka program

Between January and June 2018, seven Australian volunteers (all female)<sup>1</sup> were based in Sri Lanka with assignments dispersed throughout the island.

The most common role for volunteers was English teacher trainer but there were also two urban planners working with government through UN-Habitat. Consistent with the emphasis on private sector development in the Country Program Plan, one volunteer was placed with a Chamber of Commerce and another with an organisation promoting female entrepreneurs.

### What our partners in Sri Lanka are telling us<sup>2</sup>

An important aim of the Australian Volunteers Program is to support our partners in Sri Lanka to build their capacity to deliver on their development objectives. Both of the partners who provided feedback reported that they were fully satisfied<sup>2</sup> with the relationship and support from the Australian Volunteers Program.

However, they were less satisfied with progress in volunteer assignments rating achievement of objectives in one case as 'limited' and in another as 'very limited'. The latter case was attributed to unfortunate timing as the students expected to work with the volunteer went on holiday almost immediately after she arrived and teacher contracts were terminated soon thereafter due to lack of funds. Fortunately, another teacher trainer encountered more positive circumstances and was able to work extensively with one counterpart and several of her students.

The partners who submitted end of assignment reports tell us that the qualities they look for in a volunteer include:

- » the ability to integrate seamlessly into the fabric of an organisation
- » the ability to work with a range of stakeholders
- » the ability to take initiative while remaining accountable to management
- » possession of problem-solving skills and ability to resolve issues in a friendly manner
- » possession of leadership qualities
- » the ability to facilitate workshops creatively and foster participation



Volunteer Joanne Duckworth with Sudamika Wickramenake, Chief Operating Officer, Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce.

1. The Australian Volunteers Program global gender split is 66% female and 34% male.

2. As none of our partner organisations submitted end of assignment reports during the period January – June 2018 this section of the report is based on verbal feedback collected by the temporary Program Officer for Sri Lanka.

### What our volunteers in Sri Lanka tell us<sup>3</sup>

Two volunteers submitted end-of-assignment evaluation reports during the reporting period. Their experiences were quite different, which makes it difficult to make country-level generalisations.

One volunteer reported a positive experience where she was able to work with three English language instructors and their students, having immediate impact on pedagogy and student mastery of conversational English. However, funding for the three instructors ceased two months before the end of her assignment, which was a discouraging result.

The other volunteer was working at the systemic and organisational level in a chamber of commerce. She had ready access to executive decision makers and was able to work with the executive committee and board members to develop a three-year plan and new processes, tools and templates that improved the financial accountability of the organisation.

She was successful in applying for Direct Aid Program<sup>4</sup> funding for a project titled 'Roles for women and youth in tourism and hospitality' and championed a gender transformative program sponsored by her partner organisation to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs in the district.

Both volunteers were satisfied with the support they received from the program.<sup>5</sup>

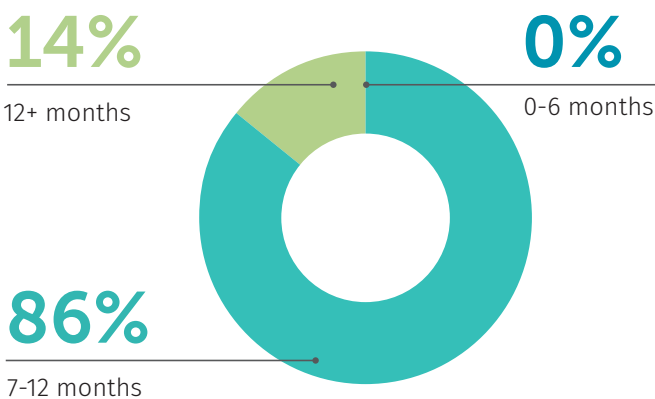
### Reflecting on a period of transition

On the 1st December 2017, seven volunteers in Sri Lanka were transitioned to the new chapter of the Australian Volunteer Program.

As the Australian Volunteers Program values learning, we conducted a survey in April 2018 to better understand the experience of volunteers and partners of the transition process.

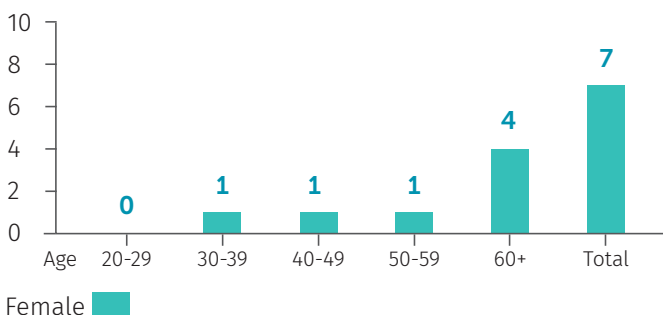
## Snapshot of volunteers, activities and feedback

### Duration of assignments

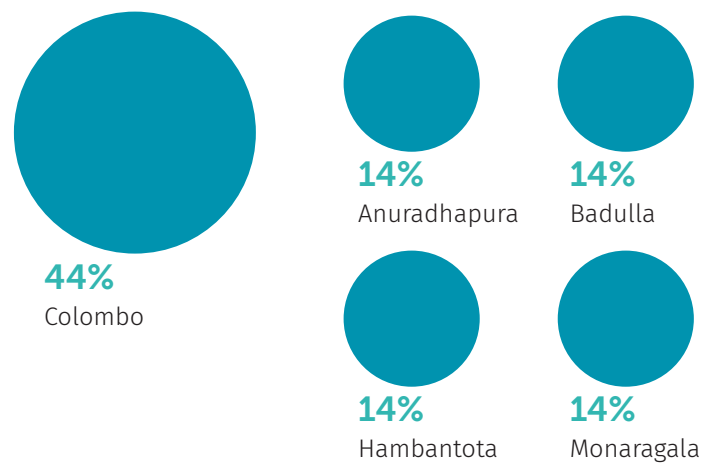


### Gender and age

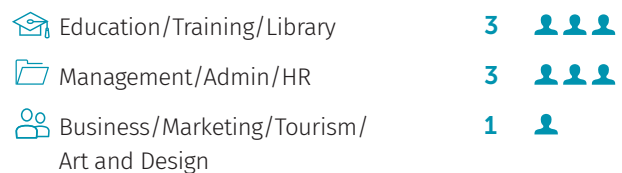
#### Women 100% Men 0%



### Location of assignments



### Most common professions of volunteers



3. Based on two volunteer end of assignment reports submitted during the period January – June 2018. This represents 50% of volunteer reports expected in this period.

4. The Direct Aid Program (DAP) is a small grants program managed by DFAT Posts.

5. Volunteers were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the program's relationship and support as 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = satisfied, 4 = very satisfied, 5 = fully satisfied.

The findings of this survey indicate that volunteers and partners in Sri Lanka were satisfied with program support and management of issues. This included in-country teams and Melbourne based staff. However, volunteers did not feel they received sufficient information about in-country assignment planning and monitoring requirements, and about medical requirements on return to Australia.

### Setting the future direction

Setting our strategic direction for the next three years has been a priority over the last six months. In June 2018, the Sri Lanka Country Program Plan for Volunteering 2018 – 2021 was developed in collaboration with the DFAT Post in Colombo.

The Australian aid program in Sri Lanka is transitioning toward an economic partnership approach. There will be a focus on linking populations with productive markets and more responsive government institutions.

Cross-cutting themes for all programs will support social unity and reconciliation, and provide ongoing support to the Sri Lankan Government to be responsive to its citizens, to seek ways to prevent future conflict and to encourage resilience in communities.

The primary objectives of the Sri Lankan Aid Investment Plan are:

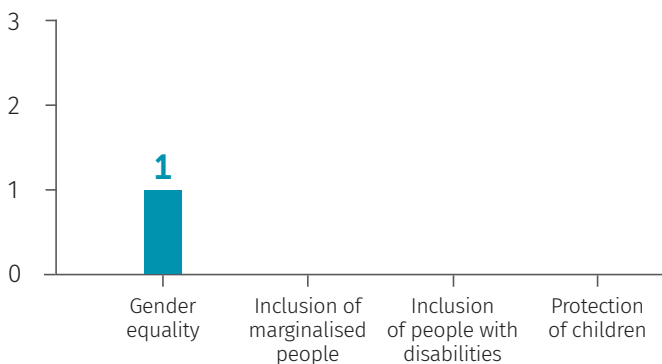
1. Expand economic opportunities
2. Support government to be more responsive to the needs of citizens and the private sector
3. Increase gender equality

The program will utilise assignments to support DFAT Post's Aid Investment Plan (Sri Lanka) objectives and key areas of focus for the Australian Aid Program.


In April 2018 a decision was taken, after an extensive review, to expand volunteer assignments into northern Sri Lanka.

## Snapshot of volunteers, activities and feedback continued

### Assignments directly contributing to cross-cutting objectives (based on 2 volunteer responses)



### Most common development sectors

Education	 <b>43%</b>
Humanitarian Aid	 <b>29%</b>
Social Infrastructure and Services	 <b>14%</b>
Business and Other Services	 <b>14%</b>

### Sustainable Development Goals most commonly addressed



### Volunteer feedback (based on 2 volunteer responses)

#### Program satisfaction

**100%**

volunteers were satisfied with the achievement of their assignment objective

**100%**

volunteers were satisfied with the level of support from the program

#### Networks and relationships

**50%**

of volunteers reported maintaining or establishing new partnerships for PO

**50%**

of volunteers expressed intention of ongoing relationships with PO

**100%**

of volunteers reported creating valuable personal relationships

# Overview of partner organisations

## 4 different partner organisations: most common types of partner organisations



## Partner organisation feedback (based on 1 PO response)

Volunteers have helped build capacity at the following levels:

**25%**  
Individual level

**38%**  
Organisational level

**37%**  
Structural level

**100%**

POs report satisfaction with the program

## Volunteers say

### Using evidence to improve urban planning in Sri Lanka

I am an urban database advisor with UN-Habitat. Our project is called the 'State of Sri Lankan Cities'. It aims to improve evidence-based planning in the nine provincial capital cities of Sri Lanka. This involves producing, for the first time, a report that looks at historical city trends and provides key analysis on where cities are going in Sri Lanka and where we need to do better. Ultimately it will help guide decision-makers in creating a better urban future for Sri Lanka.

As part of this initiative, I recently brought together a range of stakeholders responsible for city planning to share ideas in a workshop setting. We undertook a visioning exercise where we thought about what we wanted in Sri Lankan cities, what data was available and how that data could be utilized to improve decision-making.

Those attending all came with different data sets which they agreed to share thus effectively creating a knowledge sharing network. It is my hope that this will help to build a foundation for improving evidence-based decision making for the future.

### Charlene Liao

*Charlene is currently volunteering with UN-Habitat as an urban database adviser and has previously volunteered as a policy adviser with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kiribati Government. Prior to this she has worked for the Australian Government and in the property sector. As an urban planner she is passionate about improving public participation in public policy and all things built environment. She was the first Australian Public Service employee and the first from the ACT to be awarded the Planning Institute of Australia's Young Planner of the Year in 2015.*

# UNDERSTANDING THE DATA

## Overview of data

Data for the Australian Volunteers Program's annual global and country reports is collected in line with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF). The data was compiled, cleaned and analysed, with every effort made to ensure the accuracy of data presented.

The sources of the data are:

- » End of assignment reports completed by volunteers
- » End of assignment reports completed by partner organisations
- » 2018 transition survey completed by volunteers and partners who novated from the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program

As with any data set, care needs to be taken in how the data is interpreted. To assist with the interpretation, program staff reflected on information also collected through stories of change and reflection workshops with program and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) staff.

## Data insights and clarifications

### Small sample size

The sample size of data for each country is often too small to draw firm conclusions. This is due to the relatively small number of volunteers and partner organisations in some countries, and the low completion rate of the reports and survey. The program is working to increase the response rate and, in particular, is working closely with partner organisations as they often have limited capacity to submit timely reports.

### Variation in assignment and volunteer numbers

In some country reports, there is a difference between the number of volunteers and the number of assignments, which is due to some volunteers carrying out multiple assignments during the reporting period. For example, if a volunteer finished one assignment and started another in the same country during the same reporting period, this will be recorded as two assignments for one volunteer.

### Variation between sectors, Sustainable Development Goals, and cross-cutting themes

The country reports present data relating to partner organisations types, the technical background of volunteers, assignment sectors, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) most closely aligned with assignments, and cross-cutting themes. In some reports, this data can appear to be at odds due to the different sources of this data.

For example, program staff enter the assignment sectors when developing an assignment, while volunteers are currently asked to report on which SDGs their assignment contributes to. The program is working to improve the coding of assignments for future reports.

### Development sectors doesn't add up to 100%

The list of common development sectors is only the top five or six sectors due to space limitations so this data does not always add up to 100%.

### Volunteer satisfaction ratings

Satisfaction ratings were given by volunteers and partners on a scale of 1 – Very Dissatisfied to 5 – Fully Satisfied. A rating of 3 or above was taken as 'Satisfied'. Future reports will provide further disaggregation.

### Different levels of building capacity

Partner organisations were asked to identify the level at which the volunteer contributed to building capacity: the individual level of staff capacity; the organisational level (systems and processes) and the structural level (networks or policy). Results given show the overall distribution of responses across all three levels.

## What we learnt in 2018

The first year of the program presented some data challenges with data being migrated, new monitoring tools being developed, and new management information systems coming online. The program is committed to continuous learning and improving and that extends to our data collection and analysis. We are working on improving data quality, relevance and clarity in future years' reports.

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The Australian Volunteers Program  
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