

# DOCUMENTING AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

# Australian Volunteers

## Introduction

This research analysed how Australian volunteers contribute to the achievement of partner organisations' gender equality objectives. It recommends improvements to strengthen partner organisations and volunteers' engagement with gender equality.

Researchers investigated:

- achievements of partner organisations to advance gender equality, based on Australian Volunteers Program case studies from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific
- the contribution of Australian volunteers to the achievements of the partner organisations in gender equality, and
- lessons and recommendations for the Australian Volunteers Program.

*'The volunteer and I did promotion and awareness (about domestic violence and the work of our office) together, even on weekends, promoting what the office does for the whole community, not just for women. We did surveys, making it ok to talk about domestic violence and we had an approach that made people comfortable to talk about these issues and reassure them that there is help out there'*

- partner organisation, Federated States of Micronesia

*'The major change for us [has] been our Victim Impact Assessment report. It is a report that we send to the court. Before, there was no such report required from court, but after the training with our volunteer, now it's becoming a requirement for the prosecutors in the High Court and investigators to ensure we provide that report and it's inside the case file before submitted to Attorney-General - it is really something that has changed the way we work with our client especially when the case is listed for hearing and change to the way we do our work.'*

- partner organisation, Kiribati

## Methodology

The research is based on 32 case studies of partner organisations covering 16 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Twenty one of these case studies were documented by the external researchers. Eleven of the case studies were documented by program staff. All case studies were based on interviews with partner organisation representatives. The information provided was triangulated with data collected from volunteers and partner organisations' assignment monitoring forms. The Australian Volunteers Program's outcome harvesting approach and story of change template was used to develop the case studies.

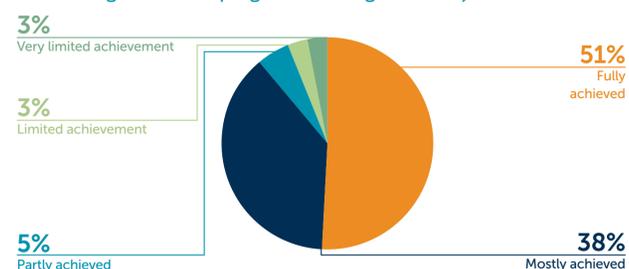
The partner organisations that were selected were either: women's rights organisation; organisations that focused on gender equality; organisations focused on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics; or organisations that had at least one volunteer assignment with a gender equality focus or that contributed to gender equality related outcomes.

## Key Findings

### Partner organisation achievements in advancing gender equality

- Supporting partner organisations with a strong inclusion agenda, established networks and clear objectives provided a good foundation for the Australian Volunteers Program to deliver targeted assignments, and advance its gender equality outcomes.
- Partner organisations improved their capacity in gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. Ninety four per cent of partner organisations showed positive changes relating to gender equality.
- Partner organisations strengthened their capacity at individual, organisational and networking levels. They are using their enhanced capacity to drive gender transformative change.
- Partner organisations achieved the greatest improvement in their capacity to deliver interventions that aimed to end violence against women and girls. This was followed by interventions in women's leadership, decision making and participation at community, national and political levels.

### Partner Organisations' progress on assignment objectives



### Alignment to partner organisation gender equality objectives and gender equality commitments

- With support from Australian volunteers, partner organisations have advanced their development objectives, including in gender equality.
- Partner organisations have contributed to their country's national gender equality commitments.
- Partner organisations' achievements in gender equality are aligned to the Australian Volunteers Program's gender equality, diversity and inclusion strategy.

### Australian volunteers' contributions

- Australian volunteers contributed to strengthening capacity at the individual, organisational, networking and partnership levels.
- They also contributed technical skills and expertise to partner organisations.
- Volunteers' interpersonal skills, attitude and approach contributed to change.
- Australian volunteers contributed to achieving partner organisations' gender equality and social inclusion outcomes.
  - Volunteer assignments contributed to partner organisation objectives about gender equality.
  - A majority of case studies showed positive changes in gender equality, diversity and inclusion due to the contribution of volunteers.
  - Volunteers actively found ways to promote gender equality and social inclusion, which is a mandatory objective for their assignments.

### Australian Volunteers Program contribution

As well as volunteer assignments, other elements of the program's support that were particularly effective included:

**Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund:** Small grant funding was highly valued by partner organisations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Impact Fund has provided:

- lifesaving information and services to women and vulnerable communities about the links between COVID-19 and violence, and
- accurate health information for communities, particularly those in remote locations or without internet connections.

**Assignment design and delivery:** Partner organisations valued volunteer assignments that were flexible, long term, inclusive, remote and were targeted to their needs.

**Approach to partnerships:** Partner organisations appreciated the inclusive approach adopted by the program when designing volunteer assignments and recruiting volunteers. The partnering process was particularly important to feminist, women's rights organisations who highlighted the importance of the alignment between volunteer values and the partner organisation's work.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations suggest ways to further strengthen the program's work to enhance gender equality:

- Enhance partnerships with existing women's rights and gender equality focused partner organisations, with a long-term view of partnering.
- Partner with organisations that have an explicit gender equality mandate.
- Consider developing an explicit resource mobilisation assignment objective (where appropriate and dependent on partner organisation type and need).
- Consider twinning arrangements and connections with gender equality focused Australian organisations so like-minded partner organisations can benefit from peer learning and new connections.
- Continue to provide partner organisations with volunteer support, small grants and networking opportunities.
- Continue to provide opportunities for partner organisation to improve their capacity to achieve their gender equality objectives.
- Support partner organisations and volunteers to establish clear gender equality objectives for assignments.

*'With the volunteer's presence, we have learned how to create our advocacy strategy and engage in individual advocacy and public advocacy, through social media, consultation groups and campaigning. She has helped us improve our communications skills, develop our slogan and key messages, develop objectives and targets for our campaigns, and with her help we have learnt to be a solid team. It becomes a big potential for us that other organisations here know the work that we do.'*

- partner organisation, Timor-Leste

*'As a feminist organisation, it is important for the volunteers to have the technical knowledge of gender equality. This reduces the burden on partner organisations to orient and train the volunteer in country. The Australian Volunteers Program offers partner organisations a diversity of Australian volunteers who have the potential to contribute to long lasting benefits for the partner organisation. The skillset and personal qualities of the volunteer was a perfect match for us [partner organisation]. The volunteer has been doing a great job and I am really happy that the program chose the right person with us in terms of her knowledge and skills in gender, administrative work, strategic planning and proposal writing, especially for us as we are specifically a gender organisation.'*

- partner organisation, Cambodia

## Acknowledgements

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