



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION PRETORIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia supports global efforts to promote gender equity

Women and girls currently make up two thirds of the one billion people in the world who lack basic literacy skills and more than 35 million girls worldwide don't have access to primary-level education.

Australia recently appointed a designated Ambassador to advocate on their behalf. Career diplomat Penny Williams has been appointed as Australia's first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls.

Speaking in Pretoria today, Australian High Commissioner to South Africa HE Ann Harrap said “The Ambassador's priorities include co-ordinating and promoting Australia's work to eradicate violence against women, improve access to services for women, protect women and girls in conflict zones and increase the representation of women in leadership roles.”

Australia has committed itself to supporting the professional development of women in Africa since the 1960's through its *Australia Awards* scholarships program. In 2012, female scholars from Africa have been awarded a record number of long and short course scholarships:

- of a total of 342 long term scholarships, 158 (46%) were awarded to women
- of a total of 347 short term scholarships, 136 scholarships (39%) have been awarded to women and 8 scholarships have been awarded to people with disabilities
- 17 outstanding African scholars were selected for Australian Leadership Award Scholarships last year and 10 (60%) of them were women.

Short Course Awards accommodate mid-career development opportunities for working professionals over a period of 12 weeks. In addition to these Awards, AusAID also offers Masters-level Scholarships and Agricultural PhD's at a range of world-class Australian universities. By 2013, Australia will offer 1000 scholarships across Africa.

Ms Harrap noted that “The theme for International Women's Day this year is 'Supporting Economic Empowerment for Women' and it is clear that supporting women's education and promoting women's leadership skills is one way to ensure that economic and social transformation can take place more quickly.”

The Australian High Commission in South Africa also coordinates a number of small grants schemes to support the development activities of NGOs in southern African countries, including the promotion of economic and social empowerment of women. Through the Australia Africa Community Grants Scheme (AACGS), the High Commission is currently funding POWER International to undertake a project in Mozambique aimed at combating domestic violence against women with disabilities in 3 districts of Zambezia province. AACGS is also supporting a 6 month practical training course for the improved hatching and raising of chickens targeting groups of women and girls in Zambia. The High Commission's Direct Aid Program, a similar flexible small grants scheme, is being used to deliver a capacity building program for NGOs working to assist women and children at risk.

For more information about the Ambassador for Women and Girls, see <http://www.dfat.gov.au/homs/wg.html>

For more information about Australia's activities to support International Women's Day 2012, see <http://www.internationalwomensday.org.au/>

For full details about all Australian Awards, see www.adsafrica.com.au

For further information on the Australian High Commission's small grants schemes, see http://www.southafrica.embassy.gov.au/pret/Development_cooperat.html

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