



# Australia India Youth Dialogue

Submission to  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
Australia India Economic Strategy

October 2017

The Australia India Youth Dialogue (AIYD) is delighted to have the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's India Economic Strategy. As the pre-eminent dialogue bringing young Australian and Indian leaders together, the AIYD is in an excellent position to provide insights on emerging trends in the relationship and what Australia should be focusing on to continue to enhance its engagement and economic connections with India.

This submission draws on the experience of the AIYD in holding six successful dialogues in India and Australia and from the 2017 survey of its AIYD network.

Key themes that the AIYD wishes to highlight are:

- 1) Young leaders want to collaborate more and want innovative projects to be more visible
- 2) Cultural understanding needs to be at the heart of Australia's engagement with India
- 3) We should explore new methods of collaboration - putting young leaders front and centre of the emerging economic strategy will pay dividends for Australia
- 4) The AIYD can be leveraged to build stronger economic ties.

The AIYD strongly believes that for Australia to build a long-term, successful relationship with India it needs to support connections and collaboration between Australian and Indian youth. This will help generate new opportunities, new ideas and new approaches to how we engage, while building a strong foundation that will bring sustained benefits to Australia. Young leaders are already making a big impact on the relationship and will continue to shape its progress into the future.

## **1. The AIYD is the leading platform driving engagement between Australian and Indian young leaders and influencers**

The AIYD was formed in 2011 to provide a sustainable platform for promising young leaders of Australia and India to meet on an annual basis, engage on issues of significance to the Australia-India relationship and foster an enduring partnership between the two countries. The Dialogue enables a rich exchange of ideas between emerging leaders to think creatively about how the Australia-India relationship may be strengthened through their own work and efforts.

Each year, the AIYD brings together 15 young Australian leaders and 15 young Indian leaders from business, government and civil society to discuss opportunities and challenges significant to the relationship. Delegates include members of parliament, CEOs, international athletes, diplomats, government officials, engineers and entrepreneurs, among others, bring a breadth and depth to of ideas to the dialogue. Each dialogue consists of four days of intensive panel discussions, break-out groups and plenary sessions that address substantive issues in the relationship, explore emerging themes and expand the opportunities for collaboration between Australia and India.

To date, we have held six highly successful dialogues over the past six years, in addition to events and engagements through the year to support the connections between Australian and Indian young leaders. This success has enabled us to build an AIYD network of close to 200 young leaders that are actively working to increase the connects between Australia and India and shape the relationship now and into the future.

The AIYD is an independent, youth-led organisation run with support from its sponsors. The Governor General of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd), is the patron of the AIYD. For the 2018 dialogue, our distinguished partners are Macquarie University, Tata Consultancy Services, the University of New South Wales, UTS Insearch and the Victorian Government.

## **2. The AIYD survey shows that young leaders want to collaborate more and want innovative projects to be more visible**

The AIYD undertook a survey of its alumni in 2017 to determine key challenges and opportunities in the relationship. Close to 70 respondents from the highly selective AIYD alumni group responded to this comprehensive survey, giving us an extremely privileged view as to how young leaders perceived the bilateral relationship between the two countries. AIYD alumni believe that the relationship needs more attention, that cultural understanding is highly important, that we need to look at the services sector for economic growth and that we need to focus on collaboration as a mechanism to enhance our relationship.

Five key findings from the survey provide insights into the current state of the relationship and how young leaders on both sides of the bilateral relationship wish to engage.

- 1. Young leaders from both countries believe the relationship is important, but is not at the level of importance it should be.** 45% of Indian alumni agreed with the statement that Australia is one of India's most important foreign relationships, whilst 72% agreed with the statement that it should be one of India's most important foreign relationships. On the Australian side, 53% of alumni agreed with the statement that India is one of Australia's most important foreign relationships, whilst a significant 92% believed it should be. Whilst these statistics are not surprising prima facie, the gap between what is perceived to be the relative importance vs the level of importance desired is an important consideration.

*Key insight: Building a greater level of awareness of the potential of Australia in India should be of immediate importance for the economic strategy*

- 2. Economic growth should come via the services sector and joint innovation projects.** When asked where economic growth should come from, 33% of AIYD alumni selected services, whilst 21% selected innovation. Only 7% selected primary resources - a telling statistic for future economic considerations. Significantly, only 21% of AIYD alumni believed that Australia and India have improved the way they partner on innovation in the past 12 months.

*Key insight: the low score attributed to improvement in innovation partnering demonstrates that either this has not improved, or it's not visible and needs to be better promoted.*

- 3. Increasing understanding of each other's culture is seen as important,** with 93% of alumni agreeing with this statement. 51% of alumni also agreed that there have been improvements in cultural relations in the past 12 months - a credit to governments and organisations involved in the cultural diplomacy between the two countries.

*Key insight: Improved cultural relations are being observed and applauded by young leaders. This should continue to be a focus in strengthening the relationship.*

4. **Collaboration between young leaders is critical and needs to be supported.** 91% of AIYD alumni agreed with the statement 'Collaboration between youth leaders in Australia and India can help to solve common challenges in both countries'. However only 52% agreed with the statement that collaboration between young leaders has improved in the past 12 months.

*Key insight: Given the infancy of this relationship and the perceived importance that young leaders play, an important consideration for us is how we visibly demonstrate that young leader collaboration is important and is happening*

5. **It is considered that Australia has a lower perception of India than India has of Australia.** Whilst 52% of alumni thought India's perception of Australia was positive, with 50% believing it had improved in the last 12 months, only 38% believed Australia's impression of India was positive.

*Key insight: For the relationship to advance, we need to improve the perception Australia holds of India and its people.*

### **3. Cultural understanding needs to be at the heart of Australia's engagement with India**

For Australia to build and sustain a close relationship and strong economic ties with India, we must continue to improve our cultural understanding of India. A deep understanding of one another is the basis for all successful relationships. The Australia-India relationship is no exception, and with India's size and diversity it is perhaps even more important. India is a highly competitive market and Australia needs every advantage it can get.

Developing a greater knowledge of Indian culture in Australia is essential for us to better understand India and gain the most from our engagement. It will help us to better understand the opportunities and challenges we face and equip us with skills to do business and engage effectively with India. Understanding and appreciating Indian culture is also essential to creating a welcoming and safe environment for Indian students and tourists - a significant part of Australia's economic relationship with India.

The AIYD itself was formed following the 2008 attacks on Indian students in Australia that significantly impacted Australia and India's relationship and has successfully worked to generate positive understanding of Australian and Indian culture. The AIYD believes that for Australia to achieve a successful relationship with India it needs to focus on increasing cultural understanding among Australian youth, India cultural capabilities programs including language learning, in-country experience and sharing culture through collaboration.

#### **It is important we develop cultural understanding among Australian youth**

The AIYD is committed to supporting young leaders in Australia and India. Young Australians will be the next generation of leaders for Australia and India's relationship. If Australia is to take a long-term view of the relationship through to 2030, then we need to focus on developing greater cultural awareness of India in young Australians. The understanding of India the AIYD generates in young leaders is already positively impacting our engagement. This should also be complemented by more support for programs in the Australian schools as well as opportunities for young professionals to enhance their India awareness and cultural skills.

### **It is important we develop India capabilities, including language learning**

India's culture informs all aspects of life, including business. What sets successful Australians engaging with India apart, through the AIYD or otherwise, is a strong understanding of Indian culture and useful engagement skills. In India's highly competitive market, in which Australia is not the only country vying for India's attention or competing to offer goods and services, cultural engagement skills will help Australians be in the best possible position to build a successful relationship with India. Programs to help equip Australians with Indian cultural engagement skills are essential at a school level and professional level. Language learning also needs to be included in this. While many transactions are performed in English, Indian language proficiency is important for engaging with and developing a deep understanding of Indian society and economy, and increases the potential for stronger and long-lasting personal and professional relationships. Very few Australian schools teach Indian languages and only two Australian universities offer Hindi. The opportunities for young professionals to develop Indian language skills is even scarcer. More programs need to be provided for Australians at school, university and young professional level to develop the cultural and linguistic skills and capabilities needed to elevate and gain the most from our engagement.

### **It's important we support in-country experience**

AIYD brings Australian and Indian young leaders together in Australia and India in alternating years. The opportunity to engage with one another face-to-face and experience the country and its culture first-hand is invaluable. Without the opportunity to go to India many of the young leaders on AIYD would not otherwise have considered the opportunities in India. The Australian Government's New Colombo Plan is an excellent initiative to provide students with in-country experiences. The Victorian Government's Hamer Scholarship program in other Asian markets is also a good example of a program to enhance young professionals understanding through in-market experience. More opportunities like this should be supported for India.

### **It's important we take a collaborative approach to cultural awareness**

The AIYD's success in helping to bring Australia and India closer together and drive real outcomes for the relationship lies in our focus on collaboration in all aspects of the dialogue, particularly cultural understanding. Each year, the AIYD runs a challenge for teams comprising delegates from both countries to pitch new projects that utilise Australian and Indian expertise. Opportunities to jointly work on projects allows Australia and India to actively engage with one another's culture and in doing so generates new forms of cultural expression or approaches to opportunities and challenges that are uniquely Australian and Indian in nature, helping to bring Australia and India closer together and demonstrating the success we can achieve working together. The Australia India Council grants program is an excellent funding platform for collaborative projects. More support could be provided through initiatives to bring potential collaborators together that may not have otherwise considered the opportunities to collaborate to generate and fund even more joint projects.

#### **4. We should explore new methods of collaboration including youth leadership organisations and bilateral hackathons**

Young leaders play a vital role in both the present and the future of the relationship. 65% of India's population is under 30 and hungry for engagement with a globalised world. Australia should stake its economic future in the bilateral relationship by taking real measures to engage the enterprising youth of India.

We propose two key approaches to building economic ties through the lens of young leadership development and collaboration:

##### **Young Leadership organisations**

Youth leadership organisations that focus on building international ties are an important complement to government initiatives (such as the New Colombo Plan) and non-government business or industry focused organisations.

As an example, AIYD brings together young business leaders, politicians, scientists, doctors, cultural leaders and sportspeople. The outcome is a bilateral network in which members can draw on an incredibly diverse range of technical skills and local knowledge

Other organisations such as Global Shapers and AIESEC have similar aims.

Government support of these organisations, both financial and diplomatic, is an important investment in the future of the Australia-India economic relationship.

Section 5 expands on how the AIYD could increase its mandate to serve this role above.

##### **Bilateral Hackathons**

Hackathons are the practice of assembling diverse teams to solve problems in a limited period of time. Using cross-country teams of young leaders is a highly effective method of analyzing and addressing issues related to economic and cultural development between India and Australia.

As an example of this practice, the AIYD manages a Group Challenge, that takes place at the annual Dialogue event. Drawing on the diverse skillsets of young Indians and Australians, the group challenges have outlined proposals for a number of exciting bilateral development activities.

Selected examples are:

- 1) A social entrepreneurship aggregator platform that brings together budding social entrepreneurs from both India and Australia with professionals (lawyers, accountants, financial advisers, other technical experts) who would like to offer their services in the not-for-profit space.

- 2) An initiative to train and develop a network of healthcare workers to provide maternal health services in rural India.
- 3) An accelerator fund to foster greater collaboration between Australian and Indian start-ups in health innovation.
- 4) An online tool to connect quality Indian B2B service providers with Australian customers.
- 5) A program which engages Australia's leading sports scientists to provide targeted support to India's burgeoning professional sports scene.
- 6) A portal to connect performing artists and media professionals from both countries, offering both a database of artists and best practices for venues, vendors, technicians etc.

These ideas and the engagement models described above provide stimuli for models with which the relationship could proceed and ways in which Australia's economic interests with India could be advanced

## **5. The AIYD is well placed to support the Australian government in building its economic agenda with India**

Given its established role within the bilateral youth relationship, AIYD serves as a useful vehicle to promote Australia's economic agenda with India. Building on the points above, there are a few avenues the AIYD could be used in order to promote these aims:

- 1) **Acting as an innovation catalyst between the two countries** - using the AIYD's "Group Challenge" or a similar offering to build greater innovation ties between young leaders in both countries
- 2) **Building adjacent industry groups** - Using young leaders to catalyse emerging industries which get less attention within the relationship. As seen in the examples above, when given the opportunity, young leaders are able to develop innovative solutions outside mainstream industries. Using young leaders as a way of catalysing secondary or emerging industries may help provide much needed momentum for emerging industries and diversify the economic portfolio
- 3) **Using the group challenge to incubate business ideas** - the "Group challenge" or a similar offering is a great way of incubating specific ideas or opportunities. We've seen the successes of this over the past two years.

Further consideration could be given to the opportunities for the AIYD to act in this space and undoubtedly this would surface more possibilities. Suffice it to say, we are ready and able to engage in a more proactive way with the Australian government as they embark on this much needed pursuit of building closer economic ties with India.