Understanding diaspora-led development & peacebuilding

Case studies of five African diaspora organisations in Australia
Research team

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Executive summary

Diaspora organisations are actively involved in peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, development, post-conflict reconstruction and human rights promotion in their countries of origin. This activity is increasing around the world and is attracting the attention of researchers, policy makers and development practitioners.

In Australia, the growing interest in engaging with diasporas is tempered by uncertainty about how they operate, who to engage with and how their unique strengths can be harnessed and supported. This report begins to answer these questions through case studies of five African diaspora organisations in Australia.

1. Peace Palette’s Nhomlau children’s centre in South Sudan’s Warrap state provides housing, education and recreational activities to up to 200 children who had previously been orphaned or made homeless by the war.

2. The Oromia Support Group Australia leverages its international networks to advocate at United Nations (UN) level and to the Australian government for the respect of human rights in Ethiopia.

3. Mamaland, a South Sudanese women-led organisation, works for the wellbeing and empowerment of women and children. They have furnished the maternity ward in the Juba Teaching Hospital, commenced computer classes for women, contributed to a rethinking of gender dynamics among the community in Australia and inspired the diaspora in Canada and the US to engage more actively in the rebuilding of South Sudan.

4. Darfur Community Association of Australia, together with the Darfur Australia Network, raise awareness of the crisis in Darfur and have a solid body of work in advocacy to the Australian government and the UN.

5. Wec Nyin, operating in South Sudan’s Warrap State, started the village’s first-ever primary school, teaching 200 boys and girls.

Findings

Diaspora organisations are implementing innovative, small-scale projects at a very low cost that are potentially replicable and scalable. However they should not be seen as smaller versions of international aid and development organisations – they have unique characteristics, strengths and challenges, which make them complementary actors in the aid and development space.

One of the great strengths of diaspora organisations is their connection to the community, which ensures projects arise out of a need identified at a grassroots level and are culturally appropriate. Because of these close connections, diasporas have high levels of contextual knowledge, quality data and access to vulnerable populations.

Diasporas are part of transnational networks. Their activities draw from, and have impact on, people in their country of origin, in Australia and on the rest of the diaspora around the world. These impacts include attitudinal shifts in areas such as gender relations, peacebuilding and trust building among communities divided by conflict.

In their advocacy and awareness-raising work, diasporas leverage their access to first-hand information, community connections and transnational networks to influence international decision makers. The organisations that took part in this study are also aware that these very connections raise questions about their impartiality and neutrality, and they consciously address these issues.
Lack of resourcing is the overarching challenge faced by diaspora organisations. Their projects are largely funded by harnessing collective remittances and community donations. These organisations are predominantly volunteer run and generally do not have the capacity to invest in organisational development that would increase their sustainability. Access to funding is the single factor that would have the most impact on the effectiveness and scale of diaspora activities.

Despite these challenges, there exists a great potential to reach new donors who seek direct contact with communities and wish to bypass the larger NGOs that act as intermediaries between the donating public and beneficiary communities. There are also opportunities to engage with multinational companies and the private sector in Australia to build social enterprises and develop small businesses in countries of origin.

Finally, these case studies show diasporas as innovators of the new humanitarian landscape. Diaspora-led development and peacebuilding makes sense in a world that expects and respects direct people-to-people links across continents and contexts. With their intimate knowledge of at least two cultures, their transnational networks, and their innovative approaches, diasporas have the power to make those connections.
Introduction

What is diaspora-led development and peacebuilding?

Diasporas have often maintained links with their countries of origin, and leveraged the opportunities offered in their adopted countries to help families and friends ‘back home’. In recent years however, there has been a significant growth in diaspora-led development and humanitarian activity around the world.¹ In addition to individual and collective remittances, establishment of business enterprises, and knowledge transfer, diasporas are implementing development and peacebuilding projects, advocating for respect of human rights, contributing humanitarian assistance and investing in post-conflict reconstruction. Research also shows the increasing prominence of diaspora groups as actors in peace and reconciliation processes.²

This work is increasingly attracting the attention of traditional development and humanitarian actors in what has been described as “the dramatic rise of ‘diaspora’ in international development debates”.³

In Europe in particular we see a range of diaspora-led organisations, think tanks and umbrella groups.⁴ The European and US aid and development sectors have increasingly engaged with these organisations over the past 10-15 years, recognising their role as complementary actors.⁵ Programs run by non-government organisations (NGOs) also seek to support these initiatives⁶ while the US and UK government aid programs have focused on fostering knowledge transfer through volunteering programs.⁷

While the full potential of diaspora organisations is only beginning to be systematically explored in Australia, it is clear that diaspora activity in this country mirrors trends overseas, with a plethora of diaspora-led organisations dedicated to health, education, livelihoods, child protection, peacebuilding and reconciliation. Post conflict contexts also frequently see members of diasporas returning to take their places in universities and government departments, applying the benefits of their Australian education and experience to the task of nation building.⁸

However, there is a lack of available literature about what diaspora-led development looks like in practice. In Australia, the lack of a nuanced understanding of the nature and impact of diaspora-led development - its strengths, challenges and potential - is a contributing factor to the slow responses of government and development agencies in recognising the work that these organisations do and the value and expertise that could be accessed through liaison with them. This raises several questions. What are the similarities and differences between diaspora-led development and the work of larger international development agencies? What have they been able to implement on the ground in communities in their countries of origin? To what extent are they successfully advocating on human rights and humanitarian issues? What opportunities do they have and what challenges do they face? Importantly, how can they be better supported? This paper begins to answer these questions and represents a first step in the quest to measure the impact of diaspora activity.
Methodology

This project documents the activities and outcomes of five African diaspora organisations that are related to human rights, peacebuilding and development in their conflict-affected countries of origin. The organisations invited to participate were diaspora-led, had well-established activities (either advocacy or project based) and represented a mix of countries and activities. Priority was given to organisations with which Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) had existing partnerships to leverage relationships of trust that would provide more in-depth and detailed information.

Data collection consisted of three steps for each organisation: review of existing literature (websites, planning documents, project evaluations etc.); a focus group discussion; and follow up interviews with key informants. Data gathered included: origins of the organisation; needs assessment; motivations of members; vision; measures of success; activities and outcomes; analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and vision for the future.

This project examines (but does not evaluate) their activities and outcomes, rather than their impact, which lies outside the scope of this project. It does however provide a basis upon which a future impact assessment could be reasonably built.

This research has been carried out by Diaspora Action Australia, with support from Oxfam Australia Southern Africa Desk, and builds on the experience of these two organisations in their work with diaspora organisations over the past six years.
Case Study 1

Peace Palette
Child protection and empowerment

Peace Palette provides shelter, safety and education in a community of 11,000 people in Turalei, Warrap State in South Sudan. Focusing particularly on supporting children and women, they also more broadly advocate for children’s rights in the country.

The organisation was formed in 2011 by South Sudanese Australians who had experienced violence, dispossession and displacement during the second Sudanese civil war of 1983-2005. Peace Palette is based in Melbourne, Australia and is registered in both Australia and South Sudan. It is comprised of 20 members from South Sudanese, Japanese, and other Australian backgrounds, and another 19 people in South Sudan.

Their main activities are focussed on the town of Turalei, located 850km from the capital Juba, which is the hometown of several Peace Palette members. Due to its proximity to the border with Sudan, Turalei suffered extensive destruction during the war and received an influx of refugees, many of them children, from the neighbouring Abyei Region. This region is one of the poorest areas in the world. While the general illiteracy rate is more than 75%, it is estimated that more than 90% of women and girls cannot read or write. South Sudan’s education indicators remain among the worst in the world with more than one million primary school-aged children lacking access to primary education. Peace Palette recognised the extreme vulnerability of children, particularly those who are homeless and rely on begging in the streets to survive.

“My father died during the war. I have seven brothers and sisters and my mother can’t afford to feed us all. Because I am the eldest son I have to go and live in the marketplace and beg for food. Whatever I get, I take home to my mother.” (M, a child now living at the Nhomlau Children’s Centre, 14)

Many members of Peace Palette were ‘Lost boys of Sudan’ - part of the group of 20,000 young Nuer and Dinka boys who fled their homes in 1987 in an attempt to escape the violence. At least half of the boys died on the year-long walk before the survivors reached the safety of the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. These experiences motivated them to improve the situation for children. Although members were raising funds and sending money to their families in South Sudan prior to the formation of Peace Palette, they believed this individualised approach could not bring about deeper, stronger and enduring development.

“We can help our families individually, and we have, but for how long? You can help your family, but then their neighbour might be sleeping hungry. How do we help the whole community? I thought the best way to give back was to work through a community organisation.” (D)

This is not without its challenges. For example, Peace Palette members spoke of the need to convince fellow diaspora members that contributing to their projects was more beneficial in the long run for South Sudan even though it meant they would be sending less to their families in the short term.

“You have to ask people for money when they’re already sending what little extra they have home. And they say, ‘you want me to give you my money instead of sending it to my family?’” (B)
Activities and outcomes

Peace Palette’s most substantial activities to date have centred on the establishment and maintenance of the Nhomlau Children’s Centre. They have also begun work on the Bachuk Community Garden, which is connected to the centre. Recent key achievements include the following.

1. The Nhomlau Children’s Centre

Peace Palette established the Nhomlau Children’s Centre in 2012. The plan to build the centre came about after community consultations identified children and young people living as ‘street kids’ in the town centre as an immediate priority as they were subjected to physical violence, forced labour and derision by many members of the community.

The centre now houses 80-200 previously homeless boys, depending on the availability of resources. Each boy has a safe living environment, education, activities, clean water and one meal a day. Girls also attend the school, sports program and other activities, and have access to meals. The girls do not live there, as Peace Palette does not have the resources to provide the level of supervision necessary for adequate child protection if both boys and girls were to live together. Additionally, many girls are in foster homes. The centre is also registered as a local school, with five subjects being taught: English, maths, science, religion and Dinka. Other activities include drama, music, poetry and sport. The centre has successfully taken children off the street and away from immediate threats.

The centre is run by one paid centre manager and 18 volunteers.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides resources to maintain the shelter. The centre is also supported by the local government authority under the Office of the Twic County Commissioner, who provided the land and security as needed, and are committed to continuing their support as the centre moves into its next phase as a family reunification centre.

2. The Bachuk Community Garden

The meals at the Nhomlau Children’s Centre are cooked by volunteers, with most food supplies provided by the World Food Programme (WFP). However the frequency of food assistance varies as a result of the political situation and military checkpoints preventing WFP from reliably delivering food to the centre. The need to increase food security and self-sufficiency led to the construction of the Bachuk Community Garden in 2014.

The Turalei community granted 4km² of community-owned land to Peace Palette to be used as a community garden. A ceremony was held to commemorate and finalise the land’s repurposing and was attended by more than 80 people, including owners of the land, the primary and sub-chief of the community, and volunteers from Peace Palette. The community gave the garden its name.

So far a site survey, land clearing and the dike construction have been completed, with the dikes doubling as walls for the garden to eliminate additional fencing costs. The dikes will prevent any wild animals from coming into the community, lessen the effect of flooding and create pools in which to grow fish at a later stage. The project aims to provide 40% of the food required by the children’s centre upon completion in 2015.

3. ‘aMaizing’ social enterprise

This social enterprise is aimed at securing the future financial stability of the centre. Peace Palette is in the process of purchasing two motorbikes to create a taxi business that would provide an ongoing source of income for the centre and employment for the community. They also plan to purchase a maize grinder that would allow the centre to lower monthly food production costs as well as sell
ground maize for further income.

4. Promotion and partnerships
Peace Palette has put a lot of effort into raising their profile and establishing partnerships on local, national and international levels, through their own networking efforts, their projects, and developing their web presence. In South Sudan they have connections with the Commissioner of Twic County, the Ministry of Social Development, World Food Programme, World Vision South Sudan, UNICEF and the International Organisation for Migration in South Sudan, with several links to other community members and personal contacts.

5. Mentoring of other diaspora groups
In 2014 Peace Palette began to mentor four other groups from the South Sudanese diaspora in Melbourne who wish to implement development projects in other parts of South Sudan where they have their own local ties. Peace Palette members are mindful that although working in the area they are from, and know best, is a strength in terms of their local knowledge, it can also lead to perceptions of bias if people from other areas in South Sudan feel excluded from their activities.

“People from South Sudan say to us: ‘Why do you only work with your own tribe? What about everyone else?’” (D)

Members of Peace Palette see this mentoring project as both a positive action geared toward greater development efforts in South Sudan, and as a way of mitigating perceptions of partiality.

6. Fundraising
Peace Palette recently hosted a fundraiser in Melbourne that raised $51,664 - consisting of donations largely from people from Turalei now living in Australia. Members credit the success of the event to the personal connections of the attendees to the project.

“Others were there but the Turalei locals in Melbourne were the most invested. They know the project and they’re attached to it. They can see the effects when they return to South Sudan.” (D)

The fundraiser has impressed upon them the power of drawing from their immediate diaspora community for support and an appreciation of the sense of collective ownership of the project among the diaspora.

Strengths and challenges
Peace Palette benefits from a very close-knit and cohesive group of members. They have first-hand knowledge of life in South Sudan through having lived there and revisiting since. They understand the dynamics of the conflict, the complex political and tribal issues, and the conditions and challenges faced by ordinary people. Many of Peace Palette’s members retain strong connections with family and friends.

The inclusion of non-South Sudanese members in the organisation enables them to draw support and investment from the wider Australian community, as well as from supporters in Japan.

Peace Palette is constrained however by the lack of secure ongoing funding that would allow them to function effectively and sustainably and to support their projects in South Sudan. They do not have an office or a paid staff member in Australia and rely on volunteers who balance many different commitments.
In South Sudan, risks including the lack of security and the unpredictability of tribal conflict.

Opportunities exist for further partnerships. Peace Palette is currently pursuing partnerships with agencies including the World Health Organization, Norwegian Refugee Council, Medicines Sans Frontiers, Oxfam and Save the Children.

The future

Peace Palette is focused on completing the community garden and social enterprise projects to ensure stability and sustainability for the children’s centre and broader community, and on rebuilding sections of the centre with more enduring materials. They also hope to begin a planned agricultural exchange program with the community of South Furano, Japan, where candidates from Turalei will live in South Furano for up to a year to learn farming skills to bring back to Turalei.

In the longer term, Peace Palette plan to establish a family reunification project for children at the centre. They also hope that the children they care for will grow up to take over Peace Palette’s role in running the centre, and more broadly work towards a better future for South Sudan.

“When I grow up I want to be a social worker and be like the example of those here. I want to continue this work.” (J, aged 12, Nhomlau Children’s Centre).

Peace Palette aims to create a development model that can be replicated in other areas of South Sudan and potentially in other parts of the world.

www.peacepalette.org
Case Study 2

Oromia Support Group Australia

Promoting human rights in Ethiopia

The Oromia Support Group Australia (OSGA) is a human rights advocacy organisation, founded in 2001, that advocates for the respect for the human rights of the Oromo people and other minorities in Ethiopia. It documents human rights abuses, conducts advocacy and campaigning, and mobilises the Oromo community in Australia to raise awareness of these issues. OSGA has 32 registered members plus another 15-20 active supporters.

It is the sister organisation of the London-based OSG International which conducts advocacy and campaigning by gathering first-hand human rights testimonies and produces reports which are distributed internationally, primarily through the diaspora.

The Ethiopian government’s increasing repression of political dissenters, particularly of people from ethnic and political minorities that include the Ogaden, Oromo and Gambella communities, is evidenced through extrajudicial execution, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill treatment and forced evictions. Human rights activists, journalists, peaceful protestors and other political dissenters are particularly targeted, and constitute many of the political prisoners in detention without trial. High levels of impunity are compounded by restrictions placed on the media and human rights and development agencies. Human rights violations of the Oromo people and other minorities therefore do not receive significant international attention.

Several of the founding OSGA members had been in contact with OSG international while in neighbouring countries after fleeing Ethiopia, which led to a suggestion from the London office to set up an organisation in Australia. Many of its members are journalists and human rights advocates who have survived torture, persecution and arbitrary detention. Their information and knowledge is based on first-hand experience and the cases of others who remain in detention. The breadth of their information increases with each new arrival in Australia.

Many members of OSGA are motivated by the desire to make this information more widely known, and express a sense of moral obligation to use their position of safety in Australia to speak out on behalf of those who cannot:

“There is no right to speak about what’s going on in the country, any torture or any injustice. The only way we can speak is if we are out here or anywhere else [other than Ethiopia].” (A)

Activities and outcomes

The OSGA’s main activities include: dialogue with the Australian government; preparation of reports and submissions to UN bodies; public speaking and awareness-raising campaigns in Australia and internationally; networking with other organisations and diaspora communities with shared interests; and information gathering.

They also support people seeking asylum in Australia, who are predominantly located in Africa, by sending information about the application process for humanitarian visas and providing documentation to support the applications. Members of the OGSA also assist in the settlement of
newly arrived migrants and refugees together with the wider Oromo community in Victoria. Recent key achievements include the following.

1. Participation in UN processes and consultations

The OSGA contributed to Ethiopia’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in 2009\textsuperscript{16} and 2014. In 2009, they produced a joint submission with the Ogaden Community in Victoria and the Gambella Community – all of whom share similar concerns. The 2014 report was submitted together with OSG International. On both occasions, they collected first-hand testimonies from among the community in Australia, particularly among newly arrived members. They also liaised with the Oromo diaspora in other countries, maximising the benefits of being part of a transnational network.

In 2014, the OSGA submitted an application for Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).\textsuperscript{17}

OSGA recently produced a submission on Oromo and other Ethiopians living in refugee situations in the Horn of Africa, as part of the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance submission to the 2014 UNHCR-NGO Consultations.

2. Challenging Ethiopian government activity in Australia

The OSGA plays an important role in awareness raising in Australia, and in challenging the claims of the Ethiopian government with regards to its human rights record. In mid-2012 a delegation of Ethiopian government officials visited Australia, which included the head of the Liyuu Police and the Somali Regional President. As the Liyuu Police of the Ogaden (Somali) region have been implicated in human rights violations which constitute crimes against humanity\textsuperscript{18} the presence of these delegates in Australia caused extreme distress to the Ogaden and Oromo diaspora population.

Over the course of the visit, the delegation and individuals associated with them held numerous meetings with the Ethiopian diaspora in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth in which personal data of attendees and their family members in Ethiopia was collected. Furthermore, less orthodox activities included the taking photos of community members who were politically opposed to the Ethiopian government and of their homes. These activities were viewed as intimidation and harassment against Ethiopian ethnic minorities amongst the diaspora in Australia, and generated fear for the safety of family members still in Ethiopia.

The Ogaden and Oromo diaspora – in particular the OSGA, Ogaden Community Group, the Ogaden Youth and Students Association, and the Oromo Community Association in Victoria – united in their response. They brought the events to the attention of AusAID, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police (AFP), kept other members of the diaspora community appraised of the situation as it unfolded and held peaceful protests. Police directed the delegation to cease clandestine meetings, and to inform them of all proposed activities.

The delegation subsequently cancelled further activities and cut short their visit to Australia. It is also understood that the intended visit to Australia by the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs later in the year was also cancelled.

The response of the OSGA, working with the wider Ogaden and Oromo communities, highlights two important features of their work. Firstly, they challenged the activities of the Ethiopian delegation through the appropriate channels, utilising the relationships they had established with MPs, DFAT and AusAID, and by working effectively with the police. Secondly, it demonstrated the OSGA’s capacity to mobilise the community across Australia in conjunction with other diaspora communities. The peaceful nature of the coordinated response in the face of intimidation and high levels of fear among the community was particularly noteworthy.
The community’s fears for the safety of family in Ethiopia appear to have been well founded: OSGA information indicates that approximately 120 people in Ethiopia, who are related to or associated with the Oromo diaspora in Australia, were detained in the immediate aftermath of the delegation’s visit.

3. Peaceful protest

Student-led protests in Oromia in April-May 2014 resulted in Ethiopian security forces killing dozens of peaceful protestors and detaining hundreds of others. The Oromo diaspora responded with a series of public demonstrations in major cities in Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Europe, Egypt, Uganda and Israel, which attracted extensive international media coverage.

The OSGA, together with other Oromo and Ogaden communities, held peaceful rallies in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Canberra. These were followed up with meetings with Australian Labor Party and Greens MPs in Canberra, and with DFAT delegates, urging that assistance to Ethiopia be tied to a respect for human rights and the freedom of the press. DFAT responded with a commitment to raise the issue internally, and with representatives of the government of Ethiopia.

The protests and associated advocacy contributed to a significant international awareness-raising campaign. The extensive media coverage by international (including the BBC) and national newspapers, African media, radio and SBS TV news in NSW, brought human rights issues in Ethiopia to the attention of the Australia public.

Strengths and challenges

The OSGA’s members have a shared vision and purpose, which is clearly articulated. They have committed members and a strong and growing skills base in areas such as advocacy and communications.

The strength of their community connections can be measured in their capacity to mobilise the Oromo diaspora across Australia and their links to the Oromo diaspora around the world. The OSGA has groups in Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide, and are in the process of establishing others in Queensland and Sydney.

OSGA now has well established advocacy networks, including Australian government departments, MPs, the UN, and the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). When liaising with these bodies, they can put a human face to the issues and speak from personal experience.

Most of the OSGA’s challenges are related to scarcity of resources. Volunteer members are overstretched and carry out several roles at a time, leading to potential burnout. They do not have an office space, nor can they pay for financial services that would allow them to demonstrate the level of financial accountability necessary to attract grant funding.

A challenge identified by the OSGA relates to their perceived legitimacy. When they conduct advocacy or produce reports, they perceive that their identity as members of an oppressed political minority in their country of origin leads to third parties questioning the reliability of their information, despite the fact that they are often citing first-hand testimonies. They seek to mitigate this risk by conducting joint advocacy with other organisations and by building their reputation as a reliable source of information.

The OSGA identified several opportunities to enhance their skills and activities through working more closely with established partners such as DAA and RCOA, as well as forming new relationships, particularly among the African diaspora in Australia.
The future

The OSGA is focussing on organisational development that will enable them to capitalise on their opportunities. This includes: fundraising, volunteer recruitment, strategic planning, building governance skills and capacity, networking, increasing membership and establishing branch offices in each state.

They will continue to build their advocacy networks and access to UN agencies and consultative mechanisms, particularly if they are successful in their application for consultative status to ECOSOC. This work will be supported through systematic data gathering and reporting. Their goal of leveraging international pressure to hold the Ethiopian government accountable to their human rights obligations remains in clear sight.

www.osgastralia.wordpress.com
Mamaland (Hope for Future Foundation) is a Melbourne-based organisation of South Sudanese-Australian women focused on awareness raising, women’s health, education, early childhood programs and the protection and support of homeless children in South Sudan. It also aims to empower women through education to play greater roles in decision-making processes and to become important actors in the development of the South Sudanese nation.

Mamaland was formed after several of the women returned to South Sudan shortly after independence to visit family and friends. They witnessed the effects of civil war that left South Sudan with the highest maternal mortality rate worldwide, where one in seven women die from pregnancy-related causes. Many of Mamaland’s members were personally affected by deaths of relatives in childbirth. When they returned to Australia in 2012, they established Mamaland and now have 13 members and four volunteers.

With many of Mamaland’s members being first generation South Sudanese, their connections to the country remain strong, both in their linkage to kin, family and friends and also through their knowledge and understanding of South Sudanese society and the conflict:

“It’s hard to explain, but it’s really touching when you see your fellow friends and children are suffering and you have got everything which can keep you going that your friend doesn’t have ... it really inspired me to be able to give to whoever doesn’t have.” (E)

Mamaland has sought out the involvement and support of a younger generation of South Sudanese Australian women who have grown up in Australia. Their knowledge and understanding has developed through media exposure, family and through visits back to the country:

“When I went to South Sudan and I got to witness everything first hand, that was when I really developed the knowledge of how serious the situation was and how much they needed our help and seeing the kids out there, some of them were more driven to get an education than I am here.” (S)

Activities and outcomes

Mamaland’s most substantial activities to date have been the delivery of a container of hospital and educational supplies to Juba. They are now working to establish a women’s health and education facility. Their other work is focused on South Sudanese community initiatives in Melbourne. Recent key achievements include the following.

1. Container delivery to Juba

In 2013, Mamaland sent a shipping container of hospital and educational supplies to South Sudan. This delivery furnished the entire maternity ward in the Juba Teaching Hospital with 28 hospital beds and other medical items. It also provided education materials for schools, clothing for the community, sporting equipment, white goods, televisions, 10 computers and six sewing machines: computer classes for women are already being offered through the Catholic Church in Juba, and sewing classes are due to start in late 2014.
This was a major first project and achievement for Mamaland. They had strong support from the local community in Australia who donated the goods and/or money to buy them, and had assistance from over 20 volunteers. Mamaland’s partnership with Rotary Australia’s ‘Rotary Donations in Kind’ program facilitated the donations process.

Despite logistical challenges and delays within Africa, the container project was highly successful and made a significant impact in South Sudan. Prior to the delivery, pregnant women were typically sharing hospital beds, sometimes needing to bring their own mattresses from home. Others were sleeping on the hospital floor after giving birth. As the hospital had previously only 73 beds, the additional 28 beds provided by Mamaland increased the number of beds by 30 percent.

The story of the arrival of the container was featured on South Sudanese national television for over a week. The response from hospital staff was overwhelmingly positive. One of the members recalls:

“It was so surprising for them [the hospital director and staff], they thought that no one would think of doing something like this. It was the first time this kind of thing had happened there.” (L)

The container project has been influential in inspiring and motivating other diaspora communities to undertake similar projects. A container has since been sent from a group in Canada, which was also reported by the South Sudanese television news.

Mamaland has also been influential as a women’s change organisation within South Sudan, where women in the community were inspired by the group’s efforts. They assisted with the container delivery and the distribution of goods, and also spoke on national television about the container. Men in South Sudan were reportedly surprised by the efforts of a women-led organisation because men would more typically undertake this kind of work.

2. Health and education centre in Juba

Mamaland’s main project is a plan to establish a health and education centre for women that would provide antenatal health care and support, with nurses and health professionals undertaking home-based check-ups. Other facilities would include a childcare centre, kindergarten and early childhood programs where children could be cared for while mothers have the opportunity to focus on developing their education in areas of health, literacy and English-language programs.

Land for the health and education centre in Juba has been identified. With backing from the church and the community, Mamaland has applied for a land grant, which is expected to be confirmed in late 2014. Once this process is complete, they will progress with the development of the centre.

3. Building profile and partnerships

In Australia, Mamaland has established partnerships with a range of community, health and church institutions. In South Sudan they have connections with the Department of Health, Women Desk, the Catholic Church and the Juba Teaching Hospital, in addition to their wider community links and personal contacts.

The media exposure on South Sudanese national television for the container project has also contributed to raising Mamaland’s public profile, both nationally and internationally. The group subsequently received an invitation to speak at the annual South Sudanese Equatoria Community Conference in the US.

4. Fundraising

Part of the organisation’s activities has involved fundraising initiatives within the Australian community. They have established ‘Street traders’, an ongoing weekly community fundraising
enterprise selling food and beverages at local soccer games. In addition they hold community fundraisers that are primarily directed towards financing the health and education centre in Juba.

**Strengths and challenges**

Mamaland’s core strengths centre on the existence of a very close-knit and cohesive group of members whose values are based on trust, respect and friendship. They share an in-depth understanding of the conflict, the complex political and tribal issues, along with an awareness of the kinds of conditions and challenges being endured by civilians. Many of Mamaland’s members retain strong connections and ties to family and friends.

There is strong leadership within the organisation with allocated roles and responsibilities. Beyond the key group members, they also have a support network of volunteers and the local community, and particularly from the younger South Sudanese generation.

Despite early doubt and scepticism on the part of male South Sudanese elders in the Australian community, Mamaland is now highly regarded and its members feel they have gained respect and a strong sense of pride from men in their community. An important outcome for Mamaland is their success in challenging traditional gender roles in the South Sudanese community.

Lack of resourcing is a significant challenge and poses risks to the sustainability of the organisation. The group has no paid staff and lacks a dedicated office. With many members balancing their volunteering at Mamaland with family and work commitments, they are constrained by limited time to devote to the organisation.

They would additionally benefit from having access to a storage facility for potential future shipping container projects to send further aid and relief items to South Sudan.

The group seeks to develop further skills in the areas of organisational development, grant writing, financial management, project management, leadership, public speaking, English language proficiency and computer skills.

As a result of relationships built with the Juba Teaching hospital during the container delivery, Mamaland now has opportunities to work with the South Sudan Department of Health, in the development of their maternal-health initiatives. Partnering with existing child centres within South Sudan and other community organisations in the country present further possibilities and opportunities.

The risks for Mamaland include a lack of support, both in Australia and South Sudan and insufficient funding. In South Sudan the lack of security, the uncertainty and unpredictability of civil war and tribal conflict pose further risks.

**The future**

Mamaland is focused on the construction of the health and education centre. There are further plans to establish a shelter and education centre for street children. A similar initiative was begun by the Catholic Women Desk group in Juba, with whom Mamaland has a strong connection, but the work stopped due to a lack of funding. Obtaining greater funding in support of their projects in South Sudan is vital for Mamaland and an integral part of having their vision realised.

While Juba was selected as the site of Mamaland’s work for its central location and access to resources, infrastructure and professional staff, they aim to extend their activities into other areas of South Sudan, once they have greater capacity and have successfully met current goals.

www.mamalandfoundation.org
Case Study 4

Darfur Community Association of Australia and Darfur Australia Network

Advocating for peace in Darfur

The Darfur Community Association of Australia (DCAA) and the Darfur Australia Network (DAN) have been working together for more than eight years to raise awareness of the conflict in Darfur and to advocate for peace in the region.

The DCAA is the overarching association for the Darfur community in Victoria. It was founded in 2003 as an increasing number of Darfuris came to Australia fleeing the conflict in Sudan. While the DCAA’s predominant focus is on settlement, social and cultural activities, it also aims to provide assistance to the people of Darfur who are affected by the humanitarian crisis. As the situation in Darfur deteriorated rapidly in 2003-4, the community felt the need to increase its support to the people in Darfur, through the formation of separate organisation.

“The community organisation wasn’t doing enough of the humanitarian advocacy work so we created DAN for those objectives – helping people in civil war, conflict, displacement and starvation.” (M)

The Darfur Australia Network was formed in 2006 to raise awareness in Australia about the Darfur crisis – which was at its peak at that time – and to advocate for international action for the protection of civilians.

From its inception, DAN was a separate legal entity. Its founding members included both Darfuri and non-Darfuri Australians, and its staff, board and volunteers have remained a reflection of this mix. Significantly, it had the support of Oxfam Australia and Caritas Australia, who assisted in its establishment. DAN’s office is based in Melbourne but they had representatives in Sydney for several years.

The Darfuri members of the DCAA and DAN have first-hand experience of the conflict and have family members in Darfur or in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, which is a key motivating factor for their involvement in this work.

“We have got our duties and responsibilities. Now for me as a Darfuri, yes I am here in Australia, enjoying my life to the fullest and there is nothing missing for me, but don’t forget that I am the only family member here because all my family members are still back in Darfur … my family is displaced and I think it is more than five years since they left their village and they [had to be] relocated. And if I am not doing anything to help that, then I am just isolating myself, not only from my family, but from the whole world, because that’s my small world and I have to do something in order to improve that.” (M)

They also consciously use their position in Australia to create links between the two countries:

“We need to push these issues and support those in Darfur. We need to be a link between here and the people in Darfur.” (E)
Activities and outcomes

DAN’s significant body of advocacy and awareness raising work includes: advocacy and policy dialogue with the Australian government; petitions; raising awareness through public rallies, art projects and exhibitions; creating and distributing education kits to schools; and public speaking. Recent key achievements include the following.

1. Advocacy and campaigning

DAN has consistently carried out advocacy to the Australian government in an effort to maintain Darfur as a priority in Australia’s international aid and development agenda.

“We need to convince the Australian government to focus on Africa, especially on Sudan... some of the most complicated issues in Africa are in Sudan.” (A)

In 2007 DAN’s advocacy focussed on urging Australia to push for the deployment of UN peacekeepers to Darfur. The Australian Foreign Minister made strong statements on this issue, and when UNAMID was later deployed, DAN successfully advocated for Australia to send peacekeepers.

Their most recent work in 2013-14 has centred on Australia’s membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and utilising its presidency to influence strategic action for enduring peace and security in Darfur and wider Sudan. DAN had adopted a phased approach to this engagement, beginning with a delegation to Canberra in November 2013 that held five meetings with Australian government and opposition MPs, as well as officials from DFAT’s Africa Branch.

The team highlighted the continuing deterioration of the situation of Darfur and presented a report, “Australia’s Role in the Responsibility to Protect Darfur”, which made specific recommendations for Australian government action during its UNSC term. It is understood that DFAT forwarded the report onto Posts in Nairobi and New York.

This trip was followed up with a briefing paper update and recommendations, which was sent to 35 MPs and DFAT in March 2014.

The dramatic escalation of violence from March to June, especially around south and north Darfur, gave renewed urgency to a further briefing paper submitted in August 2014 and another planned delegation to Canberra in October 2014. During this trip, DAN plans to submit a petition with the request that the Australian government presents it for tabling at the UNSC during its November presidency.

2. Awareness raising

In recognition of the role that Australian public opinion plays in policy development, DAN and the DCAA have held several successful awareness raising events.

Promoting Peace for Darfur: This event was held during Refugee Week 2014, at Flinders Street Station, one of the oldest and busiest train stations in Melbourne’s CBD. Community members and DAN volunteers interacted with commuters over a six-hour period, collecting signatures on a petition to urge the Australian government to use its position in the UNSC to improve the security and protection of civilians in Darfur. This was supported by theatre performances, an information display, and a video presentation. An estimated 1,100 people were exposed to the exhibit, over 2,000 flyers and 1,600 business cards were distributed and the DAN Facebook page received a 200% increase in traffic. The petition had gathered 962 signatures as at September 2014.

Far to here: photo exhibition: Held in 2012 in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra (opened by the Immigration Minister in Parliament House), this exhibition showed images of Darfur community members together with their stories, and an exhibition of Darfuri children’s photography as they
captured their new Australian environment on film. The exhibitions attracted thousands of visitors and provided media opportunities.

_Forgotten People Project:_ In 2007, DAN involved schools, Darfur community members, community groups and volunteers around the country in a project that created hundreds of thousands of knotted squares of material to symbolise the hundreds of thousands of people killed in the Darfur crisis. Exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney featured these works, together with photographs of Darfur community members.

3. **Peacebuilding and conflict resolution**

The DCAA sees a need to build trust amongst the diaspora in Australia as inter-tribal tensions in Darfur are mirrored within it.

> "The real problem now back home is mistrust with the rebels there and even in the community here. We need to unite.” (I)

Peacebuilding within Australia is important both for community harmony as well as for the prospects of peace in Sudan because they recognise that a diaspora that is united carries a more legitimate voice that will attract international support.

DCAA also sees that the diaspora has unique opportunities to promote peace because this is much more difficult inside Darfur:

> "Maybe people from outside Darfur can influence things back home by joining together... It’s hard to get people together and to trust their enemies ... It’s easier to do this here. Our communities can’t do this [at] home. The government in Sudan is still the authority. There – it’s all in the hands of the government. Here we have the opportunity to do things as the diaspora that we can’t do back home.” (I)

In 2012 and 2013 DAN, in partnership with the DCAA, conducted capacity building workshops on peacebuilding in Melbourne and Sydney. The skills developed in these workshops were transferable to local peacebuilding efforts within Australia.

The process of working to build trust among the communities is still in its early stages. In 2012, the DCAA visited communities in Brisbane and Sydney to explore the possibilities of overcoming inter-tribal differences.

> "We try to get people to sit down and discuss why there is fighting, to get to the bottom of the intertribal clashes and ... move forward. Maybe we can get to peace.” (I).

There was enthusiasm for the idea, but the initial meetings did not result in a commitment to continue the process. Despite these setbacks, the DCAA believes there is community support for this work. In a community consultation conducted by DAN in May 2013, there was consensus that peacebuilding training was to be encouraged with the Darfur diaspora in all states, and also with the Janjaweed-allied diaspora community. The significance of the desire to engage with Janjaweed-allied communities cannot be underestimated, given the scale of suffering in Darfur at the hands of the pro-government Janjaweed militia.29

**Strengths and challenges**

The DCAA and DAN have an established track record of advocacy, campaigning and awareness raising spanning 10 years. They have a network of institutional relationships with international development agencies, African diaspora organisations, Australian government departments and wider community sector organisations. Many community members have strong skills in advocacy, event management, public speaking, community outreach, social media, communications and research.
The work of DCAA and DAN however is also facing some significant challenges.

Australian public interest in Darfur has waned in recent years and, despite the escalation of the conflict in Darfur in 2014, the crisis has not regained media attention or its visibility in this country. The Australian government’s aid policy shift away from Africa also reduces the likelihood of strong Australian action on this issue.

For the DCAA, it has also become increasingly difficult to maintain Darfur community activism. As the community becomes more settled in Australia, and people’s commitments to work and family increase, maintaining a strong core of committed volunteers has been a challenge, despite the energy and enthusiasm of those members newly arrived from Darfur. This situation has led to a loss of funding from long-term partners, with the result that DAN will close at the end of 2014.

The community now faces the challenge of transitioning the humanitarian advocacy and campaigning activities of DAN into the DCAA or through a group of its committed members who will continue the advocacy work. There are opportunities to build on the successes of DAN and to reinvigorate community activism by engaging a core of new members. Social, sporting and community-building activities are planned, with the aim of engaging the younger generations and connecting them with their history and cultural backgrounds.

Training of newly arrived community members in communications and grant writing is also underway, and DAN will continue to mentor this group though the current advocacy program in 2014.

**The future**

Despite the uncertainty around the transition process, members of the DCAA maintain their commitment to advocating for the safety of the people of Darfur and for peace in their country of origin.

Preliminary planning has begun with key members of the DCAA exploring options for the future: it is hoped that a new generation of advocates may reconfigure the community’s approach to advocacy and campaigning.
Case Study 5

Wec Nyin Australia

Building peace through education in South Sudan

Wec Nyin Australia provides primary education for girls and boys in South Sudan. It was formed in 2009 after one of the co-founders travelled from Australia back to his home in Aweng district, Warrap State, and met with members of his community. Both locals remaining in the area and members of the diaspora in Australia held a shared vision of empowerment and peace building through education in South Sudan. Wec Nyin currently has 18 members in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, and three volunteer teachers in South Sudan.

Wec Nyin is based in Australia for a number of reasons, particularly the size of the South Sudanese diaspora, greater levels of resource availability and political stability in Australia. Another key factor cited by members for the decision was the strength of Australian laws around transparency, responsibility, and accountability for organisational governance. Members also consider Australia a starting point for Wec Nyin, and dream of a larger decentralised global organisation in future with offices in other countries.

Most of Wec Nyin’s members in Australia are first generation South Sudanese Australians who maintain strong connections to South Sudan. Many were inspired by trips back to the area, and members travel there whenever possible.

“I went to school late, in a refugee camp. My experience gave me a chance at education due to the UN. What I saw in my classes was that everyone wanted a chance at life through education. Then I came to Australia ... I thought, what can I do to help back home? Another friend ... went back to South Sudan and met with elders ... They too said ‘education’. So we will build from Australia a school and education in South Sudan.” (M)

“We know the area very well, we know people: that’s why you see the mobilisation of resources because we talk to people we know, and they trust us and we trust them.” (A)

Wec Nyin works in the village of Agoor Anyuon, in the Aweng district of Warrap State, as this is both a highly neglected area and where founding members are from. Agoor Anyuon has a population of 2000 with rates of less than 1% for secondary education and 2% for primary education. It borders Abyei to the north, Western Upper Nile to the east, Eastern Gogrial to the south, and Central Twic to the west. This location has previously made peaceful settlement difficult due to conflict in the neighbouring areas spilling into the village over the last few decades. However, it has also come to be a place many have moved to during more peaceful times due to its central location.

“The area is a good place to hide when these crisis are going on, so it attracted many people to settle ... We thought if the kids are going there, we need to keep them engaged.” (A)

Activities and outcomes

Wec Nyin’s most substantial activities to date have been establishing regular provision of primary education, and the construction of interim structures to house the classes. They are in the process of building a permanent primary school with modern facilities that will provide education for all grade
levels. Furthermore, the group have secured land and a building that upon renovation can serve as classrooms for a secondary school. Recent key achievements include the following.

1. Primary education and the Totnyith Red Star Primary School

Primary level classes have begun in Agoor Anyuon. In 2009, communal land was granted with the permission of the elders for the purposes of building the Totnyith Red Star Primary School. Land surveying and clearing followed soon after. In 2010, construction of tukuls (thatched huts) began. Three were built as classrooms - a temporary solution until the larger, permanent school building with modern facilities is constructed. Three volunteer teachers have been recruited from the community. Currently, grades 3, 4 and 5 are taught to around 200 girls and boys.

“[The community] are seeing the changes, because that area never had a school, or health facilities, or good roads. So when we started that school, the kids went to classes and they came home with their exercises and homework. The parents are seeing there is a great chance and there are going to be good changes coming in the future.” (A)

A further impact of the school is its contribution to ethnic harmony in the area. Previously, the students were mostly Dinka-speaking children, however with the renewed outbreak of conflict in 2013, Nuer children started attending as families from areas such as Unity State and Western Upper Nile began moving into the area for its relative safety.

“They couldn’t speak Dinka, but they could integrate well, because Arabic is used as another means of communication for everyone. They go to the school as well, Nuer kids, and started speaking Dinka, and all the Dinka kids started speaking a little Nuer. So it actually signalled to us that the area is strategic, and it can do great things later on if we develop it.” (A)

“Children … are learning together in the tukul and do not know who is Nuer or Dinka but only know that they are friends and [seek a] safe place and education.” (A)

Now that the teaching is well established, Wec Nyin’s focus is on fundraising to complete the permanent Totnyith Red Star Primary School buildings. The planned school will have a multi-classroom building and teach all primary grades. The community is invested in the project and is contributing land and materials.

Wec Nyin members are mindful of not beginning the project until all funds have been raised, as managing the expectations of the community is very important to them: a half completed or aborted project would be very psychologically and politically negative for the community.

2. Allocation of site for secondary school

Wec Nyin has secured land for a secondary school close to the primary school site. A nearby village had started construction of a school building on the land but it had been abandoned due to lack of resources. Members of Wec Nyin spoke with members of the community who would still dearly like it to be completed, and hope Wec Nyin can complete this project.

“They told us this is another challenge. They said ‘if you can complete this school all the kids of the neighbourhood can go here’. … If we had resources it would be very, very easy to begin lessons because the land is already there and the building is already there.” (A)

3. Fundraising

A major part of the organisation’s activities in Australia are fundraising initiatives within the local community. Wec Nyin has hosted community events in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide to raise awareness about their projects and collect donations for the construction of Totnyith Red Star
Primary School and to support the payment of teachers.

“When we organise, we ask everyone, from all areas of South Sudan in Australia. Some are from the [school’s] area, or know it, some don’t. They’re all happy to help for the development of our nation: they say ‘we will support you’. They come in with a very good motive, they are motivated, and they give us a lot of encouragement.” (A)

Strengths and challenges

Wec Nyin’s core strengths are based on their shared values, shared vision and strong focus on a clear project with discrete phases. They have knowledge of the conflict and context, and strong connections with the community.

Members of Wec Nyin strongly feel that the psychological impact of their development efforts is as important as the more tangible effects of positive social improvements for their community in South Sudan.

“In 2012 when that crisis came, the people thought they would never go to school, but now they think it is possible. They have hope. It will help the whole community.” (A)

Of the challenges they face, lack of resources is one of the greatest.

Political instability and tribal clashes also pose risks to Wec Nyin’s work. Should civil war erupt again, it may force the children out of schools and Wec Nyin’s funding activities will be affected.

Members also identified the isolation of their group from civil society and the general community in Australia as a risk. However, they see working towards connecting with people and organisations beyond the South Sudanese diaspora as a great opportunity. They want to increase the diversity of their volunteers to include other, non-South Sudanese Australians.

The future

Wec Nyin’s next step is to build the Totnyith Red Star Primary School and provide classes in all primary grades, in a safe environment for children of the area. Paid teachers will be recruited, providing employment to local people. It is envisaged that children from different areas and groups could learn together to promote social cohesion. Organisationally, Wec Nyin is also working on enlisting volunteers among the diaspora in Brisbane and Perth to add to their volunteers in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide.

Upon successful completion of Totnyith, Wec Nyin plans to establish a secondary school.

It also aims to expand operations to other countries that diaspora members are located in. They hope to have offices with many members being involved to construct schools and support teachers in other areas of South Sudan. Members also emphasise that long term success would see Wec Nyin operating with staff and volunteers from many different communities, embodying peaceful multiculturalism.

www.wenyau.org.au
Discussion of findings

1. Successful projects are implemented with few resources.

The previous section profiled the selected achievements of five organisations that have been achieved with very modest budgets and are largely or wholly run by volunteers.

A striking feature of these organisations is the discrepancy between their output and income. In financial terms, their projects are implemented at minimal cost, relying predominantly on volunteer labour, in-kind support, donations (including from the volunteers themselves), fundraising events and small grants. It is worth bearing in mind however, that if they were to record and cost their volunteer time and in-kind contributions, the real monetary value of their projects would be apparent.

2. Diasporas have high levels of contextual knowledge and access to quality data.

Diasporas have detailed contextual knowledge of their countries of origin that is applied to their projects. This includes an understanding of cultural norms, social and economic structures, political processes, historical context and the dynamics of the conflicts themselves.

They have access to data that is not always readily accessible to international institutions, through daily or weekly contact with family, community and colleagues in countries of origin. The OSGA, together with OSG International, base their advocacy on these direct sources of information, combined with first-hand testimonies from people recently arrived in refugee camps in neighbouring counties, or in Australia. This access to information is particularly significant in areas that receive little independent or international media coverage, such as remote rural areas, or in contexts where independent media is restricted. These direct community linkages are particularly relevant within the changing humanitarian landscape, where many of the larger international organisations face challenges to access of humanitarian space.

3. Connection to community: The great strength of diaspora projects is their origin in the community. Projects are culturally appropriate and arise out of a need identified at a grassroots level.

All five organisations are firmly embedded in their communities in their countries of origin. They have grown organically out of a need identified through their founders’ personal experiences and/or through direct personal contacts.

Because the organisations have grown out of community requests and lived experience, the need for their projects is clear from the outset. Needs assessments are based on community consultations combined with first-hand knowledge of area they are working in. Requests for support arising from discussions with the community are often the catalyst for the establishment of the organisations themselves rather than as a later part of the program design. In the case of Peace Palette and Wec Nyin, their projects are established in their founding members’ villages. Similarly, the hospital equipment sent by Mamaland met a clearly identified need because of their close liaison with the director of the Juba Teaching Hospital director, who identified the items required.

Projects are also characterised by strong community ownership. Wec Nyin was established through requests from the community, who have donated the land, some materials and labour for the construction of the school. This level of community buy-in is also evident in the establishment of Peace Palette’s children’s centre and community garden. The land for the community garden was bestowed by the community elders with a handover ceremony and the community gave the garden its name – a significant symbolic act of ownership.
An interesting feature is the capacity of the diaspora to influence cultural, social and gendered norms. Wec Nyin consciously encourages the attendance of both Dinka and Nuer students, and of both girls and boys in the school, which they see as strategic for the construction of a peaceful and equitable society. They also cite multiculturalism, gender equality, and religious tolerance as a primary reason for operating in nations like Australia.

4. Engagement with local authorities.

The three South Sudanese organisations in this study also liaise with national and local authorities in the regions they work in. Mamaland has developed a relationship with the Department of Health through the Juba Teaching Hospital, and Peace Palette’s Nhomlau Children’s Centre is directly supported by the local government authority under the Office of the Twic County Commissioner and they have an established relationship with the Ministry of Social Development.

They also work with the traditional authorities who hold significant influence in the governance of their regions. For both Peace Palette and Wec Nyin, the construction of their children’s centre and school would not have been possible without the active support of traditional authorities.

5. Engagement with countries of origin also achieves impacts among the diaspora in Australia.

All five organisations call on the wider diaspora community for support, resources and attendance at events, and they recruit new members from within the community. Mamaland has been particularly (and perhaps unusually) successful in engaging the second generation who have grown up in Australia. These organisations provide opportunities for the diaspora to come together, support the people “back home” and give reassurance that someone is doing something even if they are not active themselves. Members of all five organisations expressed a strong need to help those left behind. Anecdotal evidence reveals that not being able to help causes distress to survivors in Australia, and has been expressed by one of Mamaland’s members as: “When today you think about some people who are not eating, you feel bad”. Research is needed to examine the role played by this type of activity on the psychological wellbeing of people who have been forcibly displaced from their homelands.

Mamaland has also played an important role in shifting gendered perceptions of women’s social roles within the South Sudanese diaspora in Victoria. They take pride in seeing the attitudes of male elders shift from initial scepticism to a newfound respect at the success of the women in mobilising the community and becoming effective change agents.

These attitudes have the potential to trickle across the seas with the permanent or temporary return of diasporas to their countries of origin post-conflict, as can be seen in the movement of the South Sudanese diaspora between the two countries since independence in 2011.

6. Diasporas are part of transnational networks. Their activities draw from, and have impact on, people in their country of origin, in Australia and on the rest of the diasporas around the world.

Diasporas are transnational by definition. As has been variously noted, the term diaspora (from the ancient Greek diaspeirein, to ‘disperse’), refers to people who have left but have maintained ties with their original homelands. It also implies connections among the diaspora in their multiple destinations. It is useful to think of diaspora activity in terms of transnational networks because their strengths, and some of their most defining characteristics, relate to the relationships they build between Australia, their countries of origin and other countries of diaspora settlement.

Wec Nyin’s members conceive of their organisation in this light. They envision expanding their
membership to incorporate the diaspora from other countries, resulting in a decentralised, global organisation.

Transnationality is one of the great operational strengths of the OSGA. Their information is gathered by representatives and contacts in over 18 countries; from refugee camps, neighbouring African countries, and from the final destination countries in Africa, Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia. When the OSGA carries out campaigns, these are often replicated in other countries with Oromo diaspora populations.

These international networks and connections also shed an interesting light on Mamaland’s shipping container project, as the strengthening of these linkages added a value that was significantly greater than the monetary value of its contents. When the container arrived in Juba, it attracted week-long national TV coverage that included interviews with one of Mamaland’s leaders who had gone to Juba for its arrival. When these reports were screened in the US and Canada, they inspired the South Sudanese diaspora to be more active in support for communities in South Sudan. The Canadian diaspora subsequently sent a container of their own and the US diaspora invited Mamaland’s representative to speak at their annual conference in 2014. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the subtle shifts in gender relationships in Australia (discussed above) may have also been felt in South Sudan and North America as a result of Mamaland’s actions.

The advisability of sending in-kind donations internationally has been widely discussed in the literature and has been discouraged by many in the past, including ACFID. As has been rightly pointed out, shipments of material goods might not be the items actually needed, they might be culturally inappropriate, may incur many unanticipated transport costs and the money would be better used in-country where it is spent on local business (with the proviso that the goods are actually available in the destination country). However the literature on this issue generally does not consider the effect of the diaspora dynamic: an interesting and unexpected outcome of Mamaland’s container project is the solidarity, community strengthening and network-building effect it has had on the community in Australia, the communities in Juba and the North American diaspora.

As can be seen from the examples of OSGA and Mamaland, the transnational character of diaspora activities lends a different perspective to their development and peacebuilding practice. Diaspora-led development is qualitatively different to other international development practice and demands a widening of the criteria with which to evaluate their projects.

7. Peacebuilding and trust-building activities in Australia have potential to influence attitudes in both Australia and countries of origin.

The potential for the diaspora to contribute to peacebuilding in their countries of origin or to exacerbate conflict are high. Given the transnational nature of diaspora identity and action, and the two-way movement of many diasporas between home country and host country, attitudes in one country can affect the other.

As advocacy-based organisations, DAN/DCAA and OSGA both directly address the issues that fuel the conflicts in their countries of origin. As both organisations promote adherence to international law, and focus their work on influencing UN processes, they demonstrate the need for peaceful action and negotiated political solutions to these conflicts. Through dialogue with the Australian government and the mobilisation of their communities for campaigns and events, they serve as an example to their communities of constructive transformation of conflict within internationally accepted frameworks.

One of the most frequent critiques of diaspora activity has been the potential for diasporas to exacerbate the conflict in their countries of origin through maintaining old grievances, raising funds to buy arms, and providing other types of support to armed actors. Recent examples of Australian
citizens taking up arms in Syria are a disturbing case in point.

Conversely however, when diasporas address deeply conflictual issues in a non-violent manner, and through engagement with appropriate decision makers, they provide an outlet for strong community sentiment that can be expressed and channelled constructively. The actions of the OSGA are illustrative. When the presence and unorthodox activities of Ethiopian government officials in Australia caused a potentially incendiary situation, the OSGA, Oromo and Ogaden communities worked closely with the Australian Federal Police to achieve a peaceful and appropriate resolution. It enabled community dissatisfaction to be expressed while also demonstrating to them that as Australian citizens their government and law enforcement agencies would respond to their concerns, thus defusing a potentially divisive situation.

Because political, religious and ethnic tensions in the countries of origin are typically reflected within the diaspora, there is a strong need to build trust in Australia between different groups, both for social harmony in Australia and also for the potential to contribute to changes in attitudes in the country of origin itself through the transnational movements of the diaspora. This need has been identified by DCAA/DAN in their efforts to construct dialogue between the different Darfuri tribes and with the members of the diaspora that are supportive of the Sudanese government-allied Janjaweed. This desire to pursue peacebuilding and trust building provides opportunities in Australia that might be more problematic in Sudan where tensions are higher.

8. Advocacy and awareness raising are focussed on influencing international decision makers.

Advocacy, campaigning and awareness raising in Australia are carried out to some degree by all five organisations profiled. For the OSGA and DAN, awareness raising and advocacy are their core activities, aimed at leveraging Australian – and by extension international – pressure to effect human rights and humanitarian impacts in Ethiopia and Sudan. They focus on dialogue with the Australian government and engagement with UN processes.

The authority of OSGA’s advocacy voice is based on first-hand evidence and is strengthened by its collaboration with the Gambella and Ogaden diaspora. Their evidence base is leveraged in their dialogue with the Australian government, in their contributions to the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance submission to the 2014 UNHCR-NGO Consultations, and in submissions to the UN Periodic Review on Ethiopia in 2009 and 2014.

DAN has also vigorously pursued a strategy of public engagement and awareness raising to mobilise the support of Australians to ensure the crisis in Darfur remains in public view. They harness the advantage of the diaspora by putting a human face to the conflict in Darfur.

In raising public awareness about the crisis in Darfur, the campaigns of DAN/DCAA also highlight Australia’s contribution to the protection of civilians in that conflict, through the aid program and also through its capacity to raise the issue in international fora, particularly at a UN level.

9. Organisations consciously address issues of impartiality and neutrality that arise from their family and community connections.

Both Peace Palette and OSGA are aware that their identities and connections to particular ethnic groups leave them open to critiques of partiality or bias.

As an Oromo organisation reporting on human rights in Ethiopia, the OSGA’s information sources are predominantly Oromo people and, to a lesser extent, other minorities. These close connections are their strength as they have privileged access to sensitive, high-quality information. However the OSGA feels that the inherent ethnic identity of their organisation is an impediment to the perceived legitimacy of their voice in the eyes of external bodies such as governments, NGOs and others.
The OSGA is taking measures to address potential perceptions of bias by seeking partnerships with organisations that have a broader focus, formalising their data-gathering systems for increased transparency, and by ensuring they gather data from a range of ethnic groups.

Peace Palette also recognises that their great strength – their local knowledge that comes from family and community ties to Turalei village – opens them to criticism of partiality, especially from other South Sudanese communities and tribes who may feel excluded. They have taken the interesting step of mentoring four South Sudanese diaspora groups in Victoria from different tribes and regions, to share their information, experience, resources and networks. This project arises both from Peace Palette’s desire to spread knowledge as widely as possible for the development of South Sudan, as well as to counteract the partiality associated with working with one village or tribe. It should also be noted that Peace Palette – like Wec Nyin and Mamaland – aim to expand their operations further than the geographical area of their original projects, pending availability of resources.

10. Opportunities to engage with multinational companies and private sector in Australia and in-country are an area for future development.

The potential to develop relationships with the private sector is being considered by Peace Palette. They see opportunities for engagement through the corporate social responsibility policies and programs of international corporations, particularly within the oil-extraction industry and those with Australian connections.

11. Diasporas harness collective remittances and community donations. They have potential to access new donors who seek direct contact with communities.

While the issue of individual and collective remittances was not a focus of this study, an interesting finding was the level at which some of these organisations harnessed funds and other resources from within their communities in Australia to support projects in countries of origin. In the case of Wec Nyin’s school project, the village elders had recognised the diaspora as a source of funding for the development of the school infrastructure. To date, Wec Nyin has raised over $20,000. Similarly, Peace Palette recently raised over $50,000 from within the diaspora to fund the Nhomlau Children’s Centre. These forms of collective remittance show the capacity of diasporas to harness diaspora community funding.

Diasporas might also be well placed to capitalise on the global trends in public fundraising which see a move towards direct donations to specific projects in-country (as has already occurred among the British-based diasporas providing direct humanitarian support during the current Syrian conflict and recent floods in Pakistan), sidestepping the traditional development actors that operate as intermediaries between donor and beneficiary. Given their transnational networks, and their identities as belonging to both country of origin and country of settlement, diaspora-led projects might have appeal for those wanting to donate directly to projects while at the same time having the extra legitimacy and transparency of an organisation registered in Australia.

12. Lack of resourcing is the overarching challenge faced by diaspora organisations.

Resourcing was the biggest challenge consistently identified by all five organisations. This has a universally negative effect on their capacity to implement and replicate innovative programs, ensure a sustainable workforce and develop their organisations to ensure long-term viability.

They all cited similar blockages to effective resource generation:

- Lack of access to government funding that is generally earmarked for larger organisations.
- Lack of awareness of available grants and lack of adequate skills in grant writing.
• Lack of paid staff that can devote time and build skills in resource generation: it is revealing that the organisation with the most success in achieving grants has been DAN, which has a paid staff member in Australia.

Organisations are predominantly staffed by teams of committed volunteers who share strong bonds of shared culture and experience. However the reliance on overworked volunteers has serious implications for the sustainability of the organisations and results in skills gaps in some areas.

This is not to say however that they do not have resources at their disposal – they have a wealth of volunteers in Australia and in countries of origin, in-kind support and some capacity to fundraise within the community in Australia - however these resources are largely in-kind or are related to project delivery with little capacity to pay overhead costs.

Opportunities exist to build partnerships and conduct online crowd funding but these too require a higher level of organisational capacity and staff time in order to be effective.

Resource scarcity also has a knock-on effect on the structures of these diaspora organisations, which tend to be organisationally “light”. The majority of their energy and resources are put into project delivery with an insufficient investment in organisational development. To operate effectively they need enough institutional structure – including paid staff, an office and paid financial services – to ensure their efficiency and sustainability, while at the same time being able to harness their potential for innovation without being constrained by over-institutionalisation. A balance is needed to ensure an organisational structure that is robust without being cumbersome, and one that allows small organisations to innovate and be flexible.

The availability of relatively modest core funding would be the single most decisive factor in improving the sustainability an effectiveness of small diaspora organisations.
Conclusion

The five organisations that took part in this study make valuable contributions to development, peacebuilding, human rights and humanitarian assistance in their countries of origin. They have unique strengths and insights, particularly due to their intimate understandings of the context, cultural norms, social and political structures (both in countries of origin and in Australia), and the dynamics of the (post) conflict and its effect on civilians.

Their connections to community enable them to design and deliver projects that are culturally appropriate and respond to genuine need, often in areas where there is no international presence or government services.

As diasporas are part of transnational networks, they are able to leverage the collective knowledge, resources and connections of these relationships in international campaigns and advocacy. Similarly, the work of Australian-based diasporas can influence the behaviour of their counterparts in other countries of settlement.

They can also play a significant role in changing social attitudes and relationships, both among the diaspora in Australia as well as in countries of origin. Gendered attitudes to women’s leadership, for example, can be positively impacted by the actions of women-led diaspora organisations.

Attitudinal shifts can also be achieved in relation to peacebuilding and trust-building within divided communities in Australia, in countries of origin and among the diaspora in other countries of settlement. Similarly, where diaspora organisations are able to take action to address humanitarian crises and human rights abuse through peaceful community mobilisation and campaigning, and engagement with UN and host-country governments, they provide a channel for their communities to take action non-violently within the rule of law. This has the potential to counteract extreme political ideologies.

The most significant challenges faced by diaspora organisations in Australia relate to resourcing. Limited access to funding has negative impacts on their projects, the development of their organisations and their sustainability. It also severely limits their potential: several of the projects described in this study would be replicable and scalable with adequate resourcing.

Diaspora activity also has impacts in Australia, through their capacity to put a human face on complex international issues, to raise public awareness about the contexts in their countries of origin, and to raise awareness of the contributions made by the Australian government and non-government organisations to peace, development and security around the world.

Finally, these case studies show diasporas as innovators of the new humanitarian landscape. Diaspora-led development and peacebuilding make sense in a world that expects and respects direct people-to-people links across continents and contexts. With their intimate knowledge of at least two cultures, their transnational networks, and their innovative approaches, diasporas have the power to make those connections.
References


Notes


Despite this growth, the role played by diaspora organisations in humanitarian crises has not been adequately discussed either by migration research or humanitarian studies, according to researchers from the Institute for International Law of Peace. Sezgin, Zeynep and Dijkzeul, Dennis, 2011. “Literature Review: Migrant Organizations as Actors in Humanitarian Crises” paper presented at the 2nd World Conference on Humanitarian Studies, in Boston, 2 June 2011.


5. European INGOs’ work is focused on three main areas – supporting diaspora groups in campaigning and development education projects; creating funding schemes for small-scale development programs; and supporting capacity building. See p.8 Judge, Ruth and De Plaen, Rachel. Op cit.

6. One such is the Danish Refugee Council’s current Danida-funded Diaspora Programme, which focuses on strengthening the role of Afghan and Somali diasporas as development agents. http://drc.dk/relief-work/diaspora-programme/

7. See UK Department for International Development-funded diaspora volunteering program http://www.vso.org.uk/about/working-in-partnership/diaspora-volunteering and USAID-funded Diasporas for Development Initiative http://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/diaspora-engagement

8. Judge and De Plaen, note that investing in diaspora organisations is therefore an investment in a “brain gain” in development, humanitarian and, particularly, post-conflict settings. p.9. op cit.

9. The research team members were: Denise Cauchi (DAA Director), lead researcher and project supervision; David Nyuol Vincent (DAA Community Coordinator), research; Richie Dean (DAA project officer), research; Belinda O’Connor (DAA communications team leader), research; Ruth Friedman (Consultant), project methodology development.

10. Peace Palette is in the process of developing a social enterprise project with women in Turalei, which is due to begin at the end of 2014.

11. In Dinka culture, girls attract dowries when they marry. As they are therefore less of an economic burden than boys in the long term, they are more likely to be cared for by relatives or friends of the family.

12. In Australia, they have established links with the Rotary Club, Diaspora Action Australia, Sacred Heart Primary School, Hot Dish, Turn the Page, Footys4all, Uniting Churches in Victoria, Mileto’s Cafe, and The Mess Hall Melbourne. Members of Peace Palette have taken part in public
speaking engagements for the Rotary Club, helping to promote awareness of their work to other organisations.

13. The OSG works with Oromo communities in South Africa, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Somaliland, Eritrea, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to collect human rights information. This is then distributed to the diaspora in countries including Canada, Belgium, Norway, Germany, US, New Zealand and Australia.


16. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. Civil society organisations are able to have input through the presentation of submissions. See http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/upr/pages/uprmain.aspx

17. NGOs in consultative status have access to ECOSOC, its subsidiary bodies and to the various UN human rights mechanisms, and can be accredited to participate in the Human Rights Council’s sessions as observers.


19. The protesters – predominantly students - had been protesting against the Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan, which will expand the boundaries of the capital into Oromia, and is feared to result in the eviction of up to 2 million Oromo farmers to make way for land leasing or sale to national and international investors. See 2014, Amnesty International. “Ethiopia: Authorities must provide justice for scores of protesters killed, injured and arrested in Oromia”. Available at: www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/002/2014/en/116b7cd2-e39f-49b6-a276-f324b07d95d4/afr250022014en.html.

Hundreds of protestors were arbitrarily arrested and detained, and the Security Force’s excessive use of force resulted in deaths and injuries to dozens of people, including students and children. The National Youth Movement for Freedom and Democracy documented killings of 61 Oromo people and the detention and beating of 903 others during and after the Oromo students protest which begun in April 2014. See “A Summary of Oromos Killed, Beaten and Detained by the TPLF Armed Forces during the 2014 Oromo Protest Against The Addis Ababa (Finfinne) Master Plan”. Available at: http://qeerroo.org/2014/07/07/12683/


21. Mamaland is currently planning to address the issue of isolation and loneliness affecting South Sudanese elders in the Dandenong community area in Melbourne’s south eastern suburbs.

22. These include: the Rotary Club, Greater Dandenong City Council, Diaspora Action Australia, Warrigal Hospital, Monash Health, St Vincent De Paul, Wellspring and the Catholic Church.

23. Women Desk is a South Sudanese women-led charity and humanitarian organisation, operating through the Catholic Archdiocese of Juba. Their work extends to adult education, hospital, orphanage and prison visits in support of women and children.


25. Due to visa complications only one peacekeeper was deployed, despite agreements to send nine.

Graham Perrett MP; DFAT and AusAID - Adam McCarthy (Assistant Secretary, Africa Branch, Americas & Africa Division); Cindy Rose (Director, East West and Regional Africa Section, Africa Branch); Emma Stone (AusAID, East West and Regional Africa Section); Anna-Maria Arabia, Advisor to Hon. Bill Shorten, Leader of the Opposition, Australian Labor Party; The Hon. Philip Ruddock MP.

27. 2013 DAN “Australia’s Role in the Responsibility to Protect Darfur: A Proposal to the Australian Government from the Darfur Australia Network.


30. While these projects benefit communities known to the organisations in question, it does not necessarily follow they are only interested in their immediate familial ties. Many respondents talked about their motivations both in terms of helping their families but also in broader altruistic terms. Both Peace Palette and Mamaland see their initial projects as pilots and have plans to replicate their projects in other areas as well. OSGA works with and advocates for other Ethiopian minorities, not only the Oromo.

31. In Diaspora Action Australia’s work, members of its partner diaspora organisations frequently express their concern and anxiety for loved ones and for the wider community that is affected by the conflict in their countries of origin. They express a strong motivation to take action to address the conditions that cause vulnerability to populations at risk.


Notwithstanding these objections, many organisations have in-kind donation programs, such as the Rotary Australia’s Donations in Kind program http://www.rotarydik.org/

34. Due to Mamaland’s liaison with the Juba Teaching hospital, and their own contextual knowledge, the need and appropriateness of the goods was not in question. However they did experience transport delays and unanticipated costs.


37. It must be noted that the political, ethnic or religious makeup of diasporas does not necessarily
reflect the demographics of the home country, particularly when a persecuted minority has fled their country of origin and settled in Australia, as can be seen in the case of the high proportion of Hazaras in Australia.


