DIASPORA PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION SEMINAR
OUTCOMES REPORT

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Executive Summary

This report builds on the recognition of the potential for diaspora in Australia to strengthen their role and contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in their countries of origins. A series of past initiatives have seen the sharing of diverse ways that diaspora have made important contributions to peace efforts.

This report is grounded in discussions held at the Diaspora Learning Network’s (DLN) Seminar on ‘Diaspora Peacebuilding and Reconciliation’ and draws on current international thinking and practice in relation to diaspora-led peacebuilding initiatives, the challenges and opportunities these present and raises questions on how to best support diaspora contributions to peace.

The seminar outputs were used to consider the implications for Australian policy and practice for both government and non-government actors who can support diaspora peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives in wider efforts to prevent conflict and promote peace, justice and security. A subsequent Policy Brief has also been prepared.

A brief overview of the Seminar and emergent themes and issues from discussions are presented in the next section, followed by a series of recommendations.

About the Seminar

Diasporas’ links to their origin countries run deep. When conflicts deteriorate “at home”, it affects diaspora communities in Australia. Conversely, peacebuilding initiatives implemented in host countries have the potential to impact peace outcomes in countries of origin. The Diasporas in Action: working together for peacebuilding, development and humanitarian response conference, convened in 2016 by the Diaspora Learning Network with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and other organisations, highlighted the important role that diaspora communities can play in peacebuilding as well as the significant contribution that they offer to Australia’s policy and practice in relation to efforts to support peace abroad. The Diaspora Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Seminar, sponsored by DFAT, was held at the University of Melbourne on Saturday 24th February 2018.

It was the first seminar in a series of three that builds on the reflections and discussions on peace, development and humanitarian response from the 2016 conference. The seminars together aim to enhance policy and practice in relation to Australian diaspora engagement in these areas.

The first seminar’s aim was to come up with practical suggestions and policy advice for the Australian government to strengthen diaspora efforts in peacebuilding and reconciliation. The Seminar engaged diaspora organisations, government and non-government actors in discussion on the unique contributions of diaspora peacebuilding efforts and explored the policy and practice implications of diaspora engagement in this field.
It was attended by 32 people representing diaspora organisations, government personnel from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, academics and organisations. The Seminar was facilitated by Samanthi Gunawardana from Monash University, Gender, Peace and Security, with support from DLN and Diaspora Action Australia (DAA).

Three representatives of diverse diaspora-led organisations whose work includes peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives shared their experiences: David Nyuol Vincent (Director, Peace Palette); Jeremy Liyanage (Director, Bridging Lanka) and Sitarah Mohammadi (Community Advocate, Hazara Community). The representatives were chosen by DLN to participate as ‘Experts’ (though they were not comfortable with this label!) to reflect on their experiences in relation to three guiding questions: What is unique about diaspora contributions to peacebuilding?; What challenges need to be addressed to open up more space for such contributions?; and How diaspora engagement in peacebuilding and reconciliation can be supported?

The terms ‘peacebuilding’ and ‘reconciliation’ were used to capture the longer-term processes aimed at not just ending violent conflict but seek to address the structural prevention of violent conflicts and the transformation of relationships, process and structures that can support peace. It is acknowledged that peacebuilding and reconciliation means different things to different people in varying contexts.

Peacebuilding can be understood to refer to a process and structural undertaking that includes non-violent approaches to conflict, reducing direct violence by addressing the ‘root causes’ and eliciting local capacities for peaceful management and resolution of conflict. In many ways, the primary goal of reconciliation is to seek ways to create time and place – within various levels of the affected population – to address and integrate the painful past, the relational as well as the political means to live together non-violently and build a positive vision of a shared future. Reconciliation in the Australian context has a particular conceptualization and can be understood differently in other contexts, such as reconciliation in contexts such as Northern Ireland, Rwanda or Timor Leste. As a colonial settler society, Australia continues a long history of reconciliation efforts amongst Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people in a process for reconciliation that encompasses rights, as well as symbolic and practical actions. In the remainder of the report the term ‘peacebuilding’ will be used to capture various approaches, that may include reconciliation, towards sustainable peace.
What is Unique About Diaspora Contributions Towards Peace?

Diaspora peacebuilding refers broadly to diaspora initiatives that can foster and support sustainable structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, recurrence, or continuation of violent conflict. These processes address both short-term and long-term objectives, from immediate humanitarian needs, through to longer-term developmental, political, economic and social objectives. The initiatives may be focused on engaging and influencing change both in the host country, with a view to positively influencing conditions in the homeland, and directly influencing conditions in the homeland. There is a wide range of ways that peacebuilders develop roles and activities to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The approaches taken may be more or less direct, with some projects having a more implicit peacebuilding aim.

At present peacebuilding is often understood through a development framework. Whilst distinct, there is a mutually reinforcing link between development and peacebuilding. Violence impedes development through direct destruction as well as through systems and practices that create injustice, poor management of resources, unequal social and economic conditions - undoing years of development gains.5

Diasporas are already key stakeholders in Australia’s international development assistance program; as development actors and as supports of Australia’s development assistance in their countries of origin.6 Yet, as peacebuilding actors diaspora are an ‘untapped’ resource, reflecting the wider call for better engagement with local actors and diaspora in conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies by state actors.7

It is important to note that whilst many development projects can aspire to work towards more stable peace and justice, we are referring to those actors, initiatives and approaches that aim to engage with what are considered the causes of conflict or are aimed at preventing, reducing or transforming conflicts towards peace and reconciliation. Whilst peacebuilding and reconciliation work can be seen to fit under broader development frameworks, there are unique contributions and considerations for gaining support or funding that require recognition, new forms of engagement and resourcing.

Lensa Dinka
(Oromia Support Group)
"We started this bold experiment about how diasporas can play a more constructive role in Sri Lanka after the war. Diaspora used to be a dirty word and doors were closing. Diaspora were associated with the Tamil Tigers, the terrorists...

Our journey was very much an exploratory one. What model could we develop with our experience? We found out in Australia that groups were in dialogue but many ended almost in violence when security people had to be called in. People yelled at each other in anger. So we asked, can we start a dialogue of action before we have a dialogue of words? We need a foundation of trust otherwise constructive dialogue is not possible...

Our question was if we did something together that we believe in together people would realise that the other party is not the devil they thought they were. Maybe this leads to a better foundation to have difficult conversations. Short term our model failed but in the longer term it's working...

We started off with listening and did deep consultation. Our first term is 20 years because we believe nothing can happen in short time. Priorities of communities are crucial but we also bring our perspective in. We listen to what they say and also to what they don’t say. We listen to what people would say if they were better informed. In some parts of Sri Lanka information is very poor. So we bring national issues to the community and talk to locals to see what works and what not."

Jeremy Liyanage, Bridging Lanka, Sri Lanka

As a starting point, there was discussion amongst seminar participants about the importance of recognition of longstanding diaspora peacebuilding efforts. That is, individuals and diaspora groups have long been making peacebuilding contributions to their communities locally and abroad, especially when people have themselves or their parents had to flee conflict in their countries of origin.

As actors, diaspora have invaluable context-specific knowledge because they are deeply-rooted in the socio-cultural norms, relations and networks, and can have greater knowledge of, and sensitivity to, local customs and traditions and the conflict context. Moreover, diaspora straddle two or more cultural contexts. That is, they have context-specific knowledge of both the place they originate from and the country where they now live. Some of the roles diaspora peacebuilders play include bridge-building, taking more global perspectives, transmission of values, lobbying and advocacy, networking and partnership, dialogue and awareness, and as experts and advisors.

“Recognition is important in regards to diaspora work because this can open doors to new opportunities”

Seminar Participant.

Seminar participants noted the importance of recognition of the unique ‘value-add’ of diaspora engagement in peacebuilding. Such as: context-specific-knowledge; long-term commitment and sustainable efforts; legitimacy of engagement; ability to build bridges transnationally; networks and connections.

“...a lot of the time Diaspora communities have the capacity to make networks and contacts with communities in countries and have a certain legitimacy. They possess the ability to find the people who are the right ones to approach. They have a more capacity to find the most effective pathways to get something done.”

Seminar Participant.
Diasporas can influence changes through the transmission of values that work against entrenched socio-political, cultural and economic systems that may perpetuate injustice, inequity, corruption or impunity in conflict contexts. Diasporas can influence changes through the transmission of values that work against entrenched socio-political, cultural and economic systems that may perpetuate injustice, inequity, corruption or impunity in conflict contexts.

Facilitator: How is it different to an area expert? Someone who worked in the area and has a lot of professional expertise. How does a diaspora differ from a person like that / an expert? Is there a different type of knowledge?

Participants: “Yes, we lived it. It’s different than a “second-hand” information. There’s a difference between knowing and experiencing.”

“The outside expert may have credibility but no legitimacy. Whereas the diaspora has legitimacy but maybe no credibility.”

Diaspora-led peacebuilding efforts can coexist with diaspora-led activities that are conflict-sustaining\textsuperscript{8} activities and can work in tandem to defuse or mitigate these. With the concern for the ways that diaspora have contributed to conflict escalation through forms of ‘hate speech’ this is particularly important.\textsuperscript{9}

An important aspect of how diaspora uniquely contribute is their ability to work from within the community against ‘entrenched mind-sets’ that perpetuate division or conflicts. For many diaspora groups whose communities have experienced division and conflict, the work of changing mind-sets often begins within one’s own circles and communities. One speaker emphasised that her work amongst friend circles of Muslim and non-Muslim Australians is her focus to challenge and present different ways of thinking and relating. Changing mindsets locally was seen as a foundation to address issues down the track, such as gender norms back in Afghanistan. For the South Sudanese community, working to change mind-sets was also central to being able to get understanding and support for peacebuilding initiatives.

This has benefits for working sensitively and with legitimacy abroad as well as for supporting and enhancing engagement by outside actors such as the Australian government and International NGOs.

“Diaspora can have a better and deeper understanding of [what] safety and security is. How international agencies or external governments might interpret what security means in a particular context. Diaspora communities have a greater understanding of this.”

Seminar Participant.

“Diaspora communities have in peacebuilding work the capacity to make networks and contact with communities. In countries [of origin] they have a legitimacy. They have the ability to find the right people to talk to. Work out the most efficient pathways to make something happen.”

Seminar Participant.

“Diasporas are uniquely placed. Diasporas coming to Australia have to broaden their perspective; this will allow forming a different perspective that can be brought back to the country. For example, in Sri Lanka there are many different perspectives and divisions, living in a multicultural country like Australia gives you the skills to deal with the challenges.”

Seminar Participant.
Diasporas can also recognise the potential peacebuilding contribution made by **modeling** other ways of approaching and dealing with conflict constructively. These ranged from being able to hold more than one perspective in mind – a result of traversing more than one culture and context – as well as being open to other possible solutions or ways or approaching problems or managing difference.

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**Bridge-building** comes from the intersectionality of the diaspora experience. It can refer to growth inwards and outwards as peacebuilders work on both inner peace and the value of their religion/tradition/culture to reconcile competing identities and work through their daily lives; intergenerational bridge-building across generations as children are raised in the host culture; and within that is the work on recognising and reconciling ‘intracommunal’ differences including views on the conflict and approaches to peace, and between the host and home countries.

There are a range of approaches taken by Australian diaspora peacebuilders and some may be more or less direct, with some projects having a more implicit peacebuilding aim.

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For many young diaspora and those who grow up or are born in Australia, their approach can be different – focused on building foundations locally to be able to influence in the longer-term globally.

Examples include projects that work to bring divided or fragmented communities together, addressing structural conflict factors and patterns, such as livelihood opportunities for young people. Having already traversed a range of realities and experiences that can broaden how issues are perceived, members of the diaspora can develop more global perspectives. This can be important in conflict analysis and can provide opportunities to generate alternative perspectives and approaches.

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“One of our government projects was to develop a new village plan but they didn’t have money for planners. So Bridging Lanka came in. The process was stuck so we organised a meeting where we would bring all the stakeholders in. The 42 entities came together and it resulted in 2 hours of abuse and screaming. The different ethnicities tore each other apart. I was happy with the output nonetheless because no one left the room. This is what they usually do. The container was, thus, strong enough to hold conflict. We learned that a vision common enough is able to hold conflict. The next meeting was six weeks later and the same thing happened but at the end of the meeting people were like “okay, I suppose you and you and I have to come together to get this done”. This was a significant step forward. They realised that they have to work together....”

**Jeremy Liyanage, Bridging Lanka, Sri Lanka**
“I was born in Afghanistan in 1998 during the Taliban era. My brother was an asylum seeker in 2000 and came to Australia... I waited three years in a refugee camp before coming to Australia.. I am the first female in my family receiving education...

I work with the community and am mainly focused on conversations: forums, politicians, national student leadership forum.... We focus on assimilation processes that women and men struggle with when they arrive in Australia. I was brought up in the community and therefore assimilated easier. But people coming here in a later stage in life struggle much more because they have a very entrenched mindset about how things were done in their home country... We aim at showing people how to assimilate rather than only telling them about it. My passion is this area working towards reconciliation and peacebuilding.”

“We have different tribes in Afghanistan, which are often in conflict with each other back home. It’s a lot easier in Australia to leave those issues behind because we live in the Australian community. There is no point in upholding those differences when we are in Australia. It also helps to live in a western society. We are a lot more influential here because we understand the basics of both cultures... We try to work together within the different tribes. We organise events for all the communities where all tribes come together. This helps in bridging ethnicities and traditions.”

Sitarah Mohammadi, Community Advocate, Hazara Community

“We had this big idea of working towards national reconciliation. But it’s important to realise that any political or peace agreement is treated from a political perspective. What had been missing was the involvement of common people on the ground. Now we wanted to take the peace idea to the people in a top-down approach. We failed because we were only focused on leaders and executives. We didn’t specify the process on how to go down clearly enough. And we didn’t identify the individual interest of the leaders. The vice president used the project to campaign and this is why no one had the ownership or drive for this project anymore once he was out of the picture. In the end we were left with the outreach project which had the aim to train peace ambassadors to bring peace idea into the communities.

Looking back we realised that the grassroots-involvement was missing. We have maintained our work since 2013 and some of our peace ambassadors are now in a position of power themselves and involved in local decision making. They are still working with us and still dedicated to our goals. We have decided to focus our work on grassroots level and it’s, as a next step, important to get the leaders behind the idea.”

David Nyuol Vincent, Peace Palette, South Sudan
The mobility and connectivity of current diasporic groups sets them apart from earlier waves of migrants. With mass media and social media, the sense of common diasporic identity may be mobilised and harnessed despite geographic separation from the homeland and from other members of the diaspora. People are able to connect and feel more connected to people globally. For diaspora youth for example, the sense of identity and belonging can connect youth that may or may not be based on a particular ethnic or tribal identity but may speak to a hybrid ‘African youth’ identity. The possibilities of increased connectivity through communication technologies has also encouraged attempts to support diaspora participation in transnational transitional justice processes.

What Challenges Need to be Addressed to Open Up More Space for Contributions?

Diaspora peacebuilding efforts takes place amidst challenging and dynamic, political landscapes. Inherent in the work are risks and challenges. A key challenge is to identify and nurture the political, economic and social space within which diasporas can identify, develop and engage the resources necessary to contribute to building more peaceful societies.

A challenge for all actors involved in supporting peace processes and reconciliation efforts is in having sufficient knowledge of who is already working in this space, what their projects are focused on and what learnings and impacts such efforts have. This is an important foundation from which to create more strategic and sustainable initiatives and support existing capacities for peace. There has been some efforts already to begin to map and understand these in relation to peacebuilding and reconciliation, with the example of the South Sudanese community as one.

A common sentiment amongst state actors and INGO actors is that current levels of knowledge of how to facilitate the participation of diaspora peacebuilding is also inadequate. Depending on how much has changed in the country of origin, and how long people have been away, a challenge is also the ability to be up-to-date with the socio-political conditions back home. Some participants described this challenge of being ‘out of touch with reality’.

Whilst many diaspora groups have close contact and connections, they may not be aware of some of the changes that occur locally or nationally, especially in contexts where there are conflict dynamics.

“Also an issue is which diaspora to trust? Different diasporas exist due to geographical differences and information sharing can be quite fragmented. Crucial is the building of trust between different diaspora groups and to build respect.”

Seminar Participant

That said, it was also emphasised that countries where people have settled, such as in Australia, can have a very limited understanding of the socio-political dynamics of conflicts abroad. Diaspora groups can be important contributors to understanding the social, political and cultural dynamics at play. This can also constrain the value of diaspora efforts if they are not fully understood by host country governments and other international actors and agencies. This problem can be confounded when diaspora actors are seen as ‘informal actors’ and not given the same value of consultation, input and engagement. The flow-on effects include, as seminar participants noted, that the focus of the government with working with big International NGOs reduces support to smaller organisations that are not as visible.
Development and peacebuilding activities in particular can often be political acts. For diasporas who have originated from conflict settings, host country policies may affect engagement. The legal status of asylum seekers, who often have temporary and limited rights in countries of residence, may affect their ability to engage with their country of origin, and their fear of government surveillance or repression may impede their capacity to engage. Seminar participants raised the question of how host country governments and other INGO actors might help diaspora groups in situations where governments in their countries of origin were intentionally de-legitimising, diminishing or obstructing the potential role and influence of diaspora groups and initiatives.

On a couple of occasions, seminar participants also raised the importance of providing ongoing avenues for people to heal individually and collectively from past hurts and trauma. The impacts of trauma continue well after people have settled in Australia and can interrelate with the work back in one’s countries of origin and in communities in Australia. That is, it is important to support approaches at both the individual and collective levels to promote healing and resilience. The ongoing impacts of trauma on individuals, families and communities are important aspects of the settlement context in Australia. Peacebuilders acknowledged the importance of supporting efforts to help deal with the past as a foundation to enhance community well-being in Australia and support peace in their countries of origin.

Another challenge that was raised, was that suspicion can be felt by people in the country of origin towards the motives and intentions of diaspora actors. Viewing contributions and actors through their own lenses and experiences can mean that diaspora peacebuilding actors need to work in ways that can foster trust, understanding and communication.

There is no cohesive diaspora so within all our groups we have fractions who are at war with each other. So we need to negotiate within our diaspora to find common ground. This is a big chunk of work but it’s central to achieve legitimacy in front of governments.

Jeremy Liyanage

This is often the case of building cohesion and trust within diaspora communities in Australia. It was commonly recognised that there are challenges to gaining trust and support when communities are fragmented and have a diverse range of views and attitudes towards peace and security. The work needed intra-communally is an essential aspect of many organisations who hope to be able to influence peace back in their countries of origin.

For diasporas who have originated from conflict settings, host country policies can be challenging and may affect engagement.

“There is no cohesive diaspora so within all our groups we have fractions who are at war with each other. So we need to negotiate within our diaspora to find common ground. This is a big chunk of work but it’s central to achieve legitimacy in front of governments.”

Jeremy Liyanage

“...restrictions of the government back home must not be forgotten... conflicts are ongoing and economy/efforts blocked > how to work efficiently when government blocks you and targets you? For example in Ethiopia lots of journalists are in prison.”

Seminar participant.

“A challenge lies with being an individual in the broader community of the diaspora. And the question of support from state of origin and host as they can be enablers but also block efforts. Where does support come from? Does it need to come from the state? Or from the own community? “

Seminar participant.

“Diasporas are considered as unique but its difficult for them to be accepted back home in their country. Locals suspect the person. Its problematic how to respond to that.”

Seminar participant.
Another challenge has been countering the negative impacts of mass and social media when it is used to perpetuate divisions and tensions. The problem of hate speech is one that is increasingly of concern. It has led to a range of diaspora-led peacebuilding initiatives that use media to influence pro-peace attitudes. In Australia, youth for example use social media to counter hate speech or negative stereotypes with counter campaigns and counter-representations. Whilst the conflict-sustaining nature of mass media and social media are well known, using information technology for constructive and positive influence is an area for greater attention and support.

A lot of work is done on a volunteer basis. It is common for members of the diaspora to contribute personally by volunteering their professional skills back in the homeland for development and peacebuilding initiatives. Some examples include development initiatives that contribute to small business development, assist in livelihoods and may contribute to the training or transfer of those skills to people back home. Moreover, diaspora groups and organisations based in Australia also operate on a largely voluntary basis. It is not uncommon for people to need to work paid roles and then volunteer their knowledge and skills.

There are many challenges presented by this lack of resourcing such as the impact on individuals and groups as well as the limits on sustainability of such efforts and their potential impacts.

A related constraint is the lack of capacity-building support coupled with ability to access funding streams. Meeting capacity-building needs, from project development through to peacebuilding training, and ability to access funding is a challenge. Participants mentioned the value in organisations such as Diaspora Action Australia that have provided capacity building support to diaspora organisations, but emphasised the need for greater support to develop. Increasing opportunities, such as the seminar, to share, learn and act were considered important. Networking is an area that is seen as beneficial to developing capacity in peacebuilding.

The following summary is of the unique contributions and challenges related to diaspora peacebuilding and reconciliation along with suggestions to meet some of the challenges inherent in the work.

**Summary of Contributions and Challenges of Diaspora Peacebuilding**

**BEYOND RECOGNITION OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

The above section reflects the ways that diaspora actors and organisations are increasingly recognised in their ability and potential to contribute positively to peace efforts. There is acknowledgement that governments and relevant departments and ministries working on home and foreign affairs have begun to explore, encourage and support the work of diaspora groups in this field. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for example, has demonstrated this through providing support to diaspora-led initiatives, supporting seminars and dialogue and supporting organisations such as Diaspora Action Australia to work with groups to develop peacebuilding capacity.

Amongst diaspora actors, there is appreciation and acknowledgement of the encouragement and support of the work of diaspora groups. That diaspora actors and organisations are recognised for their ability and potential to contribute positively to peace efforts as an important foundation for moving forward. Beyond recognition is the need for creating better conditions and policy frameworks to enhance support and increase potential impacts.
• There exists recognition of the strengths of Australia’s diversity, the strength of connections to countries of origin and the transnational engagements of diasporas that can have a positive effect on efforts to build peace where there are conflicts.

• Australian diaspora communities are engaged in both inwards and outwards focused efforts to promote peace.

• Individuals and groups who have fled conflicts, experienced persecution and other gross human rights violations require opportunities to rebuild their lives and that healing and recovery from past traumatic experiences is an ongoing challenge for many Australians.

• Recognition that diaspora groups represent a range of perspectives and experiences which can create multiple pathways to peace and reconciliation.
  • Recognition of the unique value-added of the ways that Community leaders, Women and Youth work towards peace and justice.

• Youth peacebuilding is especially important.
  • For example, youth hold unique transnational identities, incorporating values and attitudes that are embedded in two or more contexts. Youth peacebuilding and reconciliation may focus on creating greater social cohesion locally in an effort to provide longer-term contributions that challenge conflict dynamics and innovate in transnational efforts for peace.

• Generational differences are important to building intracommunity understanding as well as cross-cutting efforts across groups.

• Recognition of the value-add of diaspora peacebuilding and reconciliation working sensitively and with legitimacy abroad.

• Legitimacy and credibility are important factors in engagement. Whilst recognizing the valuable legitimacy diaspora actors can have, consider ways to increase credibility of diaspora actors such as by lending backing by DFAT to diaspora-led initiatives.

• Encourage and support collaboration and partnership between INGOs and diaspora-led initiatives.

• Diasporas can influence changes through the transmission of values that work against entrenched socio-political, cultural and economic systems that may perpetuate injustice, inequity, corruption or impunity in conflict contexts.

• Continued support is needed for the creation of opportunities and space for community dialogue and initiatives that challenge entrenched mindsets and allow people to work through attitudes and past experiences that can be barriers to the transformation of conflict and divisions.

• The community-based work of diaspora in Australia provide important foundations for peacebuilding efforts abroad through creating alternative ways of dealing with conflict, creating models and alternative approaches, fostering wider community understanding and harmony, and networks and mechanisms that can counter conflict-sustaining or negative influences and messaging.
• Support opportunities for different diaspora groups to share, reflect, learn and develop peacebuilding strategies and knowledge in the Australian context;

• Support an ongoing forum for groups to come together and share and exchange experiences across several Australian states;

• Support network mechanisms that can sustain diaspora peacebuilding;

• Support organisations such as DAA/ DLN that provide opportunities for knowledge development, capacity building and networking;

• Record monitor and evaluate efforts where there has been state support to diaspora-led peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts across DFAT sections and branches; and by state government actors and use these to enhance efforts and influence other states to support and engage in wider diaspora peacebuilding initiatives (such as Canada and the US);

• Recognise the importance of diaspora engagement and transnational connections in developing policies and approaches to violent conflicts and protracted conflict settings beyond humanitarian and development approaches;

• In conflict situations where the diaspora connections play an important role in influencing (positively and negatively) conflict drivers (such as South Sudan), work with diaspora actors to identify and develop governmental approaches to build peace such as developing stances on leaders and political elites; supporting capacity and leadership amongst diaspora leaders and youth leaders especially;

• Supporting innovative youth initiatives that can harness transnational networks and technologies towards positive and constructive transformation of conflicts;

• Support and acknowledge the importance of projects and initiatives that have implicit peacebuilding aims such as those that focus on meeting humanitarian needs but may provide important processes that support peacebuilding;

• Recognise and support the mitigation of barriers to interventions in conflicts, such as working with diaspora groups to support, enhance and complement with governmental efforts.
The third part of the Seminar discussion focused on some ways that government actors can facilitate diaspora peacebuilding and engagement - namely through developing policy frameworks and making sufficient funding available.

A key aspect of this is recognising diaspora organisations as key stakeholders and to incorporate them in development and peacebuilding efforts. And that the role and contribution of diaspora in peacebuilding can be seen as part of Australia’s own foreign policy objectives for peace and security and as part of Australia’s national interests.

Working with diaspora is in line with Australia’s national interests and international efforts to support peace and security.

How Can Diaspora Engagement in Peacebuilding be Supported by Government Actors?

“Central is also the question about how the government is supporting a country. How is the money allocated? If even a fraction of funds would go to diaspora initiatives this would go a long way. We need international agencies to support our work.”

David Nyuol Vincent.

Furthermore, diaspora peacebuilding can be viewed within the current development paradigm especially in relation to Australia’s ability to meet the SDG’s. Australia is committed to the internationally agreed framework for achieving sustainable peace and prosperity in the world, through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All of which recognise the central importance of peace to sustainable development. Goal 16 recognises the long reaching consequences of conflict for development outcomes. Working with diasporas is also a key way of realising the focus on multi-stakeholder collaboration that is the direction of Goal 17 of the SDGs.

Funding, core and project-based, is in need and discussion went to how groups can be best considered for funding as partners? What are possible new models in terms of funding and also partnership? What are those models and where can we start those conversations and also continue them?”

“Wish the Australian government could embrace innovative edge. As David says, take a percentage of funds and send it in a very different way. Come up with a more effective model. Encourage Australian government to create innovative edge – more partnerships [with diaspora groups]. Negate future conflicts that may be coming our way that we’re not aware of.”

Seminar participant.
Summary and Recommendations on Policy Frameworks and Funding Streams

Policy Frameworks that can Enhance Diaspora Engagement

Government actors can best focus on recognising diaspora actors as important actors to engage with and support. Support can be given through enabling diaspora organisations to access funding mechanisms, enabling networking and platforms, monitoring general progress and creating the necessary policy framework to facilitate greater participation.

- Recognition of the role and contribution of diaspora in peacebuilding as part of Australia’s own foreign policy objectives for peace and security.

- Diaspora peacebuilding work can be viewed within the current development paradigm especially in relation to Australia’s ability to meet the SDGs.

- Goal 16 recognises the long reaching consequences of conflict for development outcomes. Include diaspora peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives as an important part of Australia’s contributions to SDG Goal 16.

- Working with diasporas is also a key way of realising the focus on multi-stakeholder collaboration that is the direction of Goal 17 of the SDGs.

- Exploring and developing better models for partnership is needed.

- Develop policy frameworks that provide basis for ongoing, rather than ad-hoc engagement with diaspora as part of foreign affairs engagement.

- Consultations with a range of diaspora members are important, both on an organizational and on a project level, and can be best achieved by having systematic consultation processes that reflect and respect community structures for consultation as well as engage organisations that support diaspora groups such as Refugee Council and Diaspora Action and Australia.

- Consult with diaspora groups as part of international affairs such as understanding, connecting and consulting with communities as part of country desk and in-country briefing and analysis, especially conflict analysis.

- Supporting and encouraging local actors and initiatives that have outward positive influences as part of DFAT’s interests (and national interests).

- Improve strategies to ensure greater diversity in organisations working in the field of development cooperation and peacebuilding.
• Policies and practices in the humanitarian and development cooperation are related to peacebuilding in a number of ways. Develop an approach to discovering these relations and coordinate relevant areas of policy and practice, while dedicating a part to diaspora-led initiatives.

• Support diaspora organisations to identify DFAT governmental sections that relate to support of peace processes;

• Develop the appropriate funding streams within existing humanitarian, aid and development allocations to make allocation to diaspora actors working on peacebuilding projects and programmes.

• Consider ways to reduce the barriers that diaspora organisations currently face in the process of accessing funds and applying for grants. Such as making information more readily available and providing customised support to organizations; and consider allocating a certain percentage of funding is allocate for diaspora organisations.

• Create guidelines to identify available funding streams.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has supported DAA and the DLN in this Seminar Series and is interested in looking at the policy implications of these discussions. In addition to the Seminars and the public outcome report, a Policy Brief will be created for DFAT’s consideration on each Seminar topic. Below is the Policy Brief that came from this seminar on Diaspora Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and builds on its recommendations.
There exists in Australia, recognition of the added value of diaspora engagement in peacebuilding. Beyond recognition is the need for creating better conditions and policy frameworks to enhance support and increase potential impacts. Diaspora Learning Network hosted a seminar on Diaspora Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Melbourne on Saturday 24th February 2018 with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the University of Melbourne.

Policy Frameworks that Support Diaspora Engagement

Australian diaspora groups are engaged in both inwards (domestic) and outwards (international) peacebuilding efforts that are consistent with Australia’s national interests and aims to promote peace and security. Drawing on DFAT’s experiences, the development of guidelines for engagement with diaspora groups with relevant government departments especially in foreign affairs, development and aid could enhance these contributions.

- Recognise the soft power potential of diaspora actors to support existing policy and programs in aid, development and peacebuilding programs.
- Drawing on DFAT experience, help diaspora know how to best engage with relevant department and ministries, by developing guidelines for engagement with diaspora actors.
- Enhance engagement with diaspora groups in Australia as part of government policies and programs that seek to pursue Australia’s commitment to the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 focused on peace and security.
- Increase pathways for working with diasporas is as a key way of realising the focus on multi-stakeholder collaboration that is the direction of goal 17 of the SDGs.
- Knowledge management to support ongoing diaspora engagement. Make available information of how DFAT has supported diaspora-led peacebuilding efforts.
- Diaspora groups represent a range of perspectives and experiences which can create multiple pathways to peacebuilding and reconciliation. Greater attention and support should be given to youth and women’s initiatives.
- Australian government departments and ministries can help build alliances and platforms for diaspora groups to share, reflect, learn and develop peacebuilding strategies and knowledge in the Australian context.
- Continue to support platforms for bringing diaspora together, such as organisations like DAA and alliances like the harmony alliance.
Developing Partnerships

There are different ways to engage with diaspora communities and to support partnerships with diaspora actors engaged in peacebuilding.

- Consultations with a range of diaspora groups are important, both on an organizational and on a project level; and can be best achieved by having systematic rather than ad hoc policy consultations.

- Engage directly with diaspora organizations and organizations that are known to support diaspora groups and have connections to government such as the Refugee Council of Australia and Diaspora Action Australia.

- Seek input from diaspora groups into program design, development, delivery and evaluation.

- Consult with diaspora groups as part of international affairs such as understanding, connecting and consulting with diaspora actors as part of country briefing and context analysis.

- Support better linkages between diaspora peacebuilding initiatives and ingos (e.g. International development organisations that have peacebuilding programs).

- Support capacity building and leadership amongst diaspora leaders engaged in peace processes in their countries of origin; and support diaspora youth and women’s leadership.

- Support projects and initiatives that have implicit peacebuilding aims such as those that focus on meeting humanitarian needs but may provide important processes that support peacebuilding in a more indirect way.

- Support projects and initiatives that address structural conflict factors and patterns, such as resource scarcity or livelihood opportunities for young people.

Make Funding Streams Available & Accessible

Identify and enhance access to relevant funding streams within existing humanitarian, aid and development allocations for diaspora actors working in peacebuilding to support both core and projects.

- Identify funding streams available to diaspora groups across DFAT that relate to support of peace processes.

- Identify and allocate for dual funding streams to support collective platforms for diaspora engagement and smaller diaspora organisations and initiatives.

- Fund initiatives that build knowledge, capacity and network supports of Australian diaspora peacebuilders.

- Make available to diaspora actors and organisations information on funding streams accessible to diaspora actors working on peacebuilding.

- As part of the localisation agenda, consider allocating a percentage of funding for diaspora organisations.

- Increase support to diaspora-led youth and womens peacebuilding initiatives.


4 Visit Reconciliation Australia website: https://www.reconciliation.org.au/what-is-reconciliation/


8 Much of the literature on diasporas and conflict focuses on their role in fueling conflict in the home country and as spoilers of peace processes (see PROI, 2010; Cochrane et al. 2009). Others such as Collier and Hoeffler (2000) have focused on funding of rebel organisations by diasporas and their role in supporting insurgencies. Diasporas can also fuel and exacerbate identity politics in the home country and by endorsing nationalist and exclusionary movements without having to experience the repercussions directly (Anderson, 1998). Conflict-sustaining activities of diasporic subgroups in the economic sphere include direct funding of pro-war political parties, organisations and campaigns, as well as for armed groups in their homelands. (Bush, 2008:198). Less focus has been given to the positive contributions diaspora make towards peace.

9 Cash remittances, especially south to south are more substantial than imagined, and they dwarf official Overseas Development Assistance. Whilst more attention has been given to the significance of cash remittances to sustaining or perpetuating conflicts, less attention has been given to its importance in supporting humanitarian and development efforts. The second Seminar in this series will look more closely at cash remittances and diaspora.


12 Sinatti, 2010, ‘Participation of Diasporas in Peacebuilding and Development’

13 Ibid.

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