



diaspora
action
australia

PEACE. DEVELOPMENT.
HUMAN RIGHTS.



ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

Why diasporas?

While European and North American aid and development sectors have been engaging with diaspora communities for the past decade, their Australian counterparts are only now beginning to be recognised for their significant contributions.

In recent years, diaspora organisations have become increasingly visible players on the global stage, involved in projects ranging from peace building, advocacy, humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction projects. Australian diaspora groups have successfully built schools in villages and increased the percentage of female students; improved local economies through job creation; and promoted respect for human rights. They do all this armed with local knowledge—and often on shoestring budgets raised by the community itself.

DIASPORAS IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is home to large and varied diaspora populations, with a quarter of the population born outside of Australia and 49% of the population with a parent born overseas. Australia's overseas-born populations come predominantly from the Asia Pacific region and Europe, but with sizeable Middle Eastern and African communities.

It is clear that diaspora activity in Australia mirrors international trends, with a plethora of successful diaspora-led organisations dedicated to health, education, livelihoods, child protection, peace building and reconciliation.

However, the full potential of diaspora organisations is only beginning to be systematically explored in Australia. Insufficient understanding of the nature and impact of diaspora-led development and humanitarian response – its strengths, challenges and potential – is a contributing factor to the slow response of government and development agencies in fully recognising the critical work that these organisations do and the value and expertise that could be accessed through engaging with them more actively.

DAA continues to be the only organisation in Australia focused on supporting and developing the capacity of diaspora communities. Through our ongoing partnerships with communities, and our shared advocacy efforts, diaspora communities in Australia are raising their voices and beginning to be recognised as under-utilised actors in global affairs.

COVER:

From top to bottom Aguer Ngor Athian, Evans Mukonza, Adibeh Abdo-Attia, Nyok Gor, Theresa Jackson, Debassa Gamelal

BELOW:

Members of Oromia Support Group Australia with Denise Cauchi



ED + Chair

On behalf of the DAA Board, communities and staff we are proud to present the 2017/18 Annual Report. Here we highlight just a few of the projects delivered and celebrate some of the many achievements of our diaspora community partners.

Our focus this year has been on delivering community driven projects that build capacity, provide mentoring and develop stronger opportunities for diasporas to advocate for their own needs. This work is made possible by the generous support of our financial partners - Oxfam, Refugee Council of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and various project based funders. We thank them for their support and continued commitment to the work of diaspora communities.

DAA plays a unique role in Australia, supporting the humanitarian, peace building and human rights work of diaspora communities from across the globe. While established economically powerful diasporas are proving to be a valued and influential instrument for Federal government, emerging humanitarian diasporas face a different set of challenges. They routinely seek support to self organise, self advocate, develop coherent strategies, gain access to networks, establish a dialogue with decision makers and develop systems to monitor and demonstrate the efficacy of their work. We operate in a challenging environment, caught between the well established settlement and international development sectors. The role, value and enormous potential of diaspora communities is yet to be fully understood and gain the recognition it deserves. Throughout the 2017/18 financial year we have strived to elevate and empower diasporas to build on their many strengths and deep commitment to their communities in Australia and overseas.

Whilst we farewelled our founding Executive Director, we had the great pleasure to welcome her successor to the team, Denise Goldfinch. Denise joined our organisation and brought to it a spectacular breadth of experience. She has developed, delivered and managed a wide range of innovative community services and community capacity building programs with diverse and mainstream adult, youth and ageing communities across all regions of Melbourne as

well as cultural competency programs across government, private and community sectors around Australia to strengthen the capacity of mainstream organisations to understand and meet the needs of culturally diverse communities. Denise has hit the ground running in the later part of our financial year and has done an incredible job at orienting herself to DAA and all our stakeholders.

As we approach DAAs 10th anniversary, the coming year presents a range of challenges and opportunities. Attracting resources to support diasporas continues to be a focus. We will be exploring new partnerships and re-examining the role, potential, impact and structure of DAA. We will work more closely with communities to better understand their needs and capabilities in an increasingly globalised world. We will explore opportunities to bring humanitarian and economically powerful diasporas together to share their strengths, learn from their challenges and raise their collective voices.

Volunteers play a critical role in DAAs work. We are extremely fortunate to attract highly skilled volunteers from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Without them, DAA would not be able to respond to the ever increasing requests for community support. We thank them for their invaluable contributions to all aspects of our work.

Much of DAAs contributions to policy development, research and advocacy is driven by the Diaspora Learning Network. The members of the DLN donate their time and expertise to this work. A strong focus of the DLN this year has been developing and shaping the Diasporas In Action conference to be held in September 2018. The conference provides a rare opportunity for academics, civil society and sector actors to come together with a focus on the role of diasporas. We thank them for their significant ongoing contributions to DAA, our communities and the sector more broadly.

Finally, and most importantly, we thank our diaspora community partners. You continue to inspire us with your tireless, committed and highly impactful work to improve the lives of your communities in Australia and overseas. Thank you for all that you do. It is our greatest privilege to work alongside you.



Denise Goldfinch
Executive Director



Hala Abdelnour
Chair

Farewell

In a year punctuated by change, DAA farewelled the founding Executive Director Denise Cauchi in March 2018. Denise was instrumental in the creation of DAA and led our organisation throughout its first 9 years. Her deep knowledge of community driven humanitarian aid, peace development and human rights activism secured DAAs reputation as a trusted partner and effective advocate.

Denise has mentored countless communities and volunteers throughout DAAs history, growing diversity and knowledge within the sector. We thank Denise for the leadership, deep commitment and vision she brought to DAA. We wish her all the very best in her next chapter.



Board Profile

DAA is governed by experienced, talented and passionate voluntary Board Members. We thank them for the ongoing commitment, strategic vision and excellent stewardship they bring to our organisation.



Hala Abdelnour (Chair)

A lover of languages, people and creativity, Hala has lived, travelled and worked in approx. 50 countries. She has participated in event management, sales, teaching and development. Hala is the founder and director of Global Echo Consultants, a change agency focusing on effective strategy, diversity and collaboration; she joined the Diaspora Action Australia Board in 2014 as a member and was elected its Chair in 2016. Trained in Psychology and Social Work, Hala has a strong work ethic and seeks to share ideas and knowledge that allow people to grow together through their working relationships. She has dedicated her career to working with diverse populations and exploring innovative business practice and effective behaviour change processes.



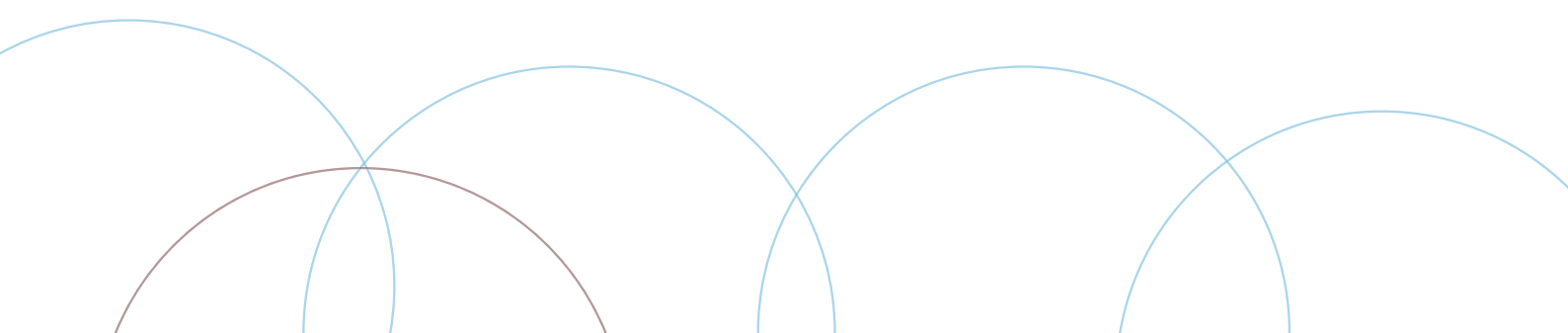
Andrew Hewett (Deputy Chair)

Andrew is a PH.D candidate in international relations at LaTrobe University and works as a sessional university lecturer. He worked at Oxfam Australia for nearly 22 years, including over 11 years as Executive Director (CEO) finishing up at the end of 2012. He visited Oxfam programs across the world, including in Africa, South Asia, the Pacific, Central America, South East Asia as well as Aboriginal Australia. Andrew has extensive international advocacy experience, was a member of the World Bank-NGO Committee for four years and has participated in and observed numerous international conferences, including those of the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank. Andrew was a member of the Executive Committee of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak council of non-government international development agencies, for over 10 years. He was also Co-Chair of the Make Poverty History Campaign and was a member of the BHP Billiton Forum for Corporate Responsibility for more than a decade.



Jamie Han Chu (Treasurer)

Jamie is a finance professional with many years of experience in commercial, government and not for profit organisations. Jamie is a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) and has a Masters of International Development. Her experience ranges across many countries and continents including Australia, the United Kingdom, Africa and Asia. In 2011 she helped establish her own not for profit organisation called FEED which supports food, environment and economic issues in Nepal. Jamie is a strong advocate for community engagement and is committed to social rights and equity.





Lisa Vettori (Board Member)

Lisa comes to the board with broad skills in community engagement, evaluation, program management and communications. She has worked locally with diverse cultural communities on community development projects, and internationally with women's human rights groups and social justice programs in Timor Leste, Bangladesh, India and Fiji. She has a particular interest in contributing to and evaluating social movement building and advocacy change programs, and supporting grassroots groups to implement projects for change. Lisa was a staff member of Diaspora Action Australia for three and a half years as the Community Engagement Coordinator, where she worked closely with many diaspora community organisations and activists in their work to promote peace, development and human rights. Joining the board has enabled Lisa to continue her commitment to the vision of Diaspora Action Australia. Lisa holds a Master of Social Science in International Development, a Graduate Certificate in Program Evaluation and a Bachelor of Business in Communications.



Mustafa Najib

Mustafa works as community worker, interpreter/translator and international aid worker. He has worked in Australia's aid programs and with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Australia. Himself a former asylum seeker who was rescued by the Tampa in 2001 and was detained in Nauru for two years, he lived in Australia on Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) for years before becoming a Permanent Resident. Mustafa has a BA in International Studies and a Masters in Asian Studies.



Karen Medica (Board Member)

Karen joined the Board in 2016 and brings to DAA skills and experience working across cultures in many countries across the Asia-Pacific region. Karen's doctoral study focused on intercultural identity and foreign aid scholarships. She has worked with a number of international not-for-profits and recently served as a former DFAT Disaster Risk Management expert in the Pacific.

Karen is keen to assist DAA in accessing grants and using her research, monitoring and evaluation skills. Karen's research interests relate to intercultural learning and the role of Diaspora in disaster response. She is a proud mother to three daughters and recently grandmother of two.

Projects Highlights 2017/18

The Gandel Project

Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) delivered the Gandel project consisting of Refugee Day and three mentoring sessions in April, May and June 2017, followed by a further three sessions in September, October and November. Topics included two consecutive public speaking and presentation skills sessions and one on compliance, requested by the community, instead of the scheduled project management session. The mentoring program concluded with a peer exchange in December with the two Karen community groups meeting to share what they had learned, their successes and challenges. The DAA Community Engagement team attended the Karen New Year in Bendigo in January and enjoyed a wonderful event, including listening to participants from the mentoring sessions demonstrating their newly-found confidence in public speaking.



A member of the Darfur community performs at the Refugee Day event



Members of Karen community attends mentoring session

In Melbourne DAA mentored two youth groups, the Oromo Youth Association Australia (OYAA) and the Noor Foundation, a Hazara youth group of mainly university students, based in Dandenong. Sessions were held from September to December on topics such as conflict resolution, governance and strategic planning. Unfortunately the youth groups were unable to join the peer exchange session in Bendigo as many members were away for the university summer break.

The Gandel project had four components: specialised mentoring to four groups; workshops; a peer exchange forum to share and exchange experiences; and a public event, with participants to come from metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. This project brought together the capacity building activities at DAA into one coordinated and structured project. The communities continue to benefit from this initiative.

South Sudan Peacebuilding Dialogues

The Peacebuilding project was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and implemented by DAA, in response to the South Sudanese community's recognition that deterioration in the conflict in South Sudan leads to increased tensions in the community in Australia.

Fifty-three South Sudanese peacebuilders and community members gathered at the Peacebuilding Dialogues in Brisbane and Melbourne to share ideas and experiences for building trust and unity within the community here to more effectively contribute to peace in South Sudan. At both events the atmosphere was optimistic and participants came to the table with open minds.

The dialogues consisted of facilitated discussions around three main themes: network building and information sharing of peacebuilding initiatives, building trust and unity within the community, and positive messaging for peace.



Buol Juuk



Apajok Biar

The meaning and definition of peace was discussed and additional themes emerged during the sessions. Informal spaces such as meal times were utilised to allow participants to interact and network.

The participants included men and women, people from different ethnic backgrounds and different ages. Discussions were respectful and constructive, and contributed to a deeper understanding of other initiatives and perspectives. People reported feeling energised and inspired to take this initiative further and expressed the wish to see similar follow up dialogues to maintain regular communication and information sharing between peacebuilders and the broader community.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Coalition Roundtables

The Coalition contacted DAA to help organise three events specifically targeted for women from diverse backgrounds with the aim of discussing topics on security and peace. The event was hosted at the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) in Melbourne with participants from a range of diaspora communities. DAA also helped organise a roundtable event in Sydney and Perth in conjunction with different WPS events hosted by other NGOs.

In November, representatives from DAA were invited to attend the policy dialogue with DFAT in Canberra to discuss the findings from the events across Australia. The three DAA representatives networked with government officials and other NGO representatives and ensured that the perspectives of Diasporas were brought into the discussions.

Participants from the consultation held at IWDA in Melbourne





Supporting South Sudanese young people to make a better future

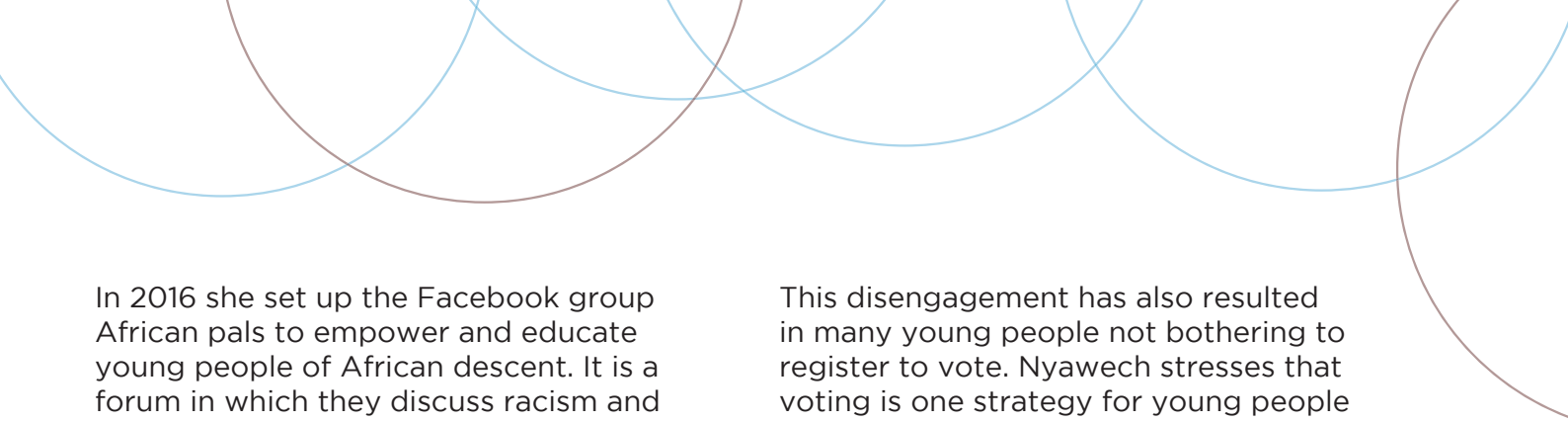
Nyawech Fouche's life changed forever in 2007. She was just 11 years old when her cousin, Liep Gony, 19, was beaten to death with iron bars in a racial attack. He was waiting for his mother to take him home.

“The media portrayed him as a gang member. They criminalised him, his friends and his family. He was a Christian, educated and played basketball. I was angry at their portrayal and I learnt to fear white people”, says Nyawech.

This tragedy and the continued negative media attention on South Sudanese youth has had profound effect on Nyawech's family and the broader South Sudanese community.

By the age of 15 Nyawech knew she had to do something. Through reading and research she gained an understanding of the historical racism directed at Indigenous people, Asian and Muslim groups in Australia and learnt about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement in the United States. She realised the problem was not the South Sudanese community, but that racism is global and systemic and leads to self-hatred, intra-racial violence, family breakdown and divided communities.

It is the real and daily racism that Nyawech and her community bear, she says, that internalises self-hatred and causes mental health issues.



In 2016 she set up the Facebook group African pals to empower and educate young people of African descent. It is a forum in which they discuss racism and negative media reporting, give advice and provide support for each other. African pals membership is currently around 12,000 young people worldwide.

Recently Nyawech deferred university to focus on her advocacy work. She approached DAA for support for a group she started after attending the Hate Speech workshops delivered under the Phase 2 South Sudan Peacebuilding Project funded by DFAT. The first meeting provided the young people an opportunity to identify many issues of importance to them and actively plan projects to make positive changes. The group has continued to meet with DAA ED each week.

One of the projects is to host community events that focus on educating and building bridges between parents and children. Nyawech explains that settling into Australia has been difficult enough for the parents, given the trauma they have already suffered as a result of war and displacement. Many have lost children and other family members and are re-traumatised here seeing their children portrayed in the media as gang members. They blame themselves, says Nyawech, but feel powerless to do anything. They are scared of losing their children, that they will be arrested if they go out, and express this by becoming over-protective and trying to keep them at home.

“This makes the kids seem rebellious, as they want to go out and meet friends and listen to music”, she says.

Another project is to develop resilience programs to address mental health issues, which are impacting education and employment opportunities for young people. Nyawech says many young South Sudanese people are dropping out of school and university and giving up trying to apply for jobs.

This disengagement has also resulted in many young people not bothering to register to vote. Nyawech stresses that voting is one strategy for young people to have a voice by voting for political representatives who will speak for their community in a fair and balanced way. The #Africanvotes has been set up to spread the word amongst young people to encourage them to register.

She says there is also a need to educate older people, as they are too frightened to question anything and many only vote to avoid a fine.

“We are going to speak to them at their church events, getting influential people to come and talk to them and understand the political process.”

More immediately, Nyawech wants to challenge media and political leaders’ racist profiling of youth crime. In July this year she went on The Project “to hold Channel 7 accountable for the way they portrayed my cousin” and in September she and Liep Gony’s mother, Martha Ojulo, spoke at a Memorial service for him on the steps of Parliament House. As well as remembering a loving and caring young man, they spoke of how racist rhetoric around youth crime by political leaders fuels racism in the community.

Nyawech says she has only recently begun to feel safe around white people, meeting people who share the same vision and think the same way.

“It’s tough because racism is so much more than skin colour. Racism is actually making a person feel less than a person.”

Nyawech is a strong young woman who leads a dynamic and committed group of young people not afraid to speak up about the damage caused by systemic racism, advocate for the South Sudanese community and work to address the issues facing their community



Marama Kofi
Oromia Support Group Australia

DAA assists Diasporas' role to bring peace and stability in the Horn of Africa

Marama Kofi, the Director of the Oromia Support Group Australia (OSGA), knows the vital role diaspora groups play in the prevention of human rights abuses in Horn of Africa countries. It is through the informal, direct connections with families and local communities that Diasporas are informed of human rights abuse; often long ahead of the time it takes for the events to be officially registered with the United Nations Human Rights Watch and governments.


The work of verification begins immediately and the OSGA then makes submissions to the UN and the Australian DFAT to inform them of the issues, lobby for action to stop the violence and promote peaceful solutions to conflict.

An Oromo man from Ethiopia, Marama arrived in Australia in 1999 from a Sudanese refugee camp through the UNHCR resettlement program.

In 2001 he was one of the founding members of the OSGA and has been an integral member of the organisation, devoting his evenings and weekends to this work for the past 17 years.

In recognition of the OSGA's contribution to human rights and promoting peace, the United Nations granted the organisation special consultative status in 2016. This allows members to attend meetings of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on human rights issues, and in July 2017 the OSGA participated in the UN global human rights conference held in London.

Marama explains that his resettlement in a peaceful country like Australia was not just about finding a safe place for himself, but trying to make places safe for those still living with conflict and oppression.



“When I came through the war when I was young and lost my family I knew I had to do something. This is what I have committed myself to,” he says.

The OSGA began as a small group based in Dandenong, Victoria, struggling with a lack of skills and training. In 2008 they partnered with Diaspora Action Australia. This partnership has provided the necessary training, workshops and mentoring to develop everything from practical reporting and accountability processes to leadership and advocacy skills; how to approach Members of Parliament, write letters, reports, submissions and media releases; how to conduct meetings and run Boards of Management, take minutes, raise funds and use social media.

He says that more recently the DAA training and workshops in women’s leadership means the women can teach the skills they have learned to other women here and overseas.

“When people from diasporas return to their country of origin, they take this experience of how things can be done differently to help educate communities to find other, non-violent ways of dealing with conflict and how to ask for their rights.”

Marama stresses that this support is needed on an ongoing basis so the OSGA can continue its work on both national and international levels and be able to inform and educate partnered organisations on human rights here in Australia and overseas. The OSGA membership has grown by 20% in Australia in the past year and now has branches in 5 cities, and their overseas representatives have increased by 30%.

One message that Marama would like the government and broader Australian community to understand is that settlement is more than material aid, education, employment and housing; that war and human rights abuses in countries of origin directly affects the mental health and well being of diaspora communities. Marama had personal experience of this last year when his only surviving brother was imprisoned for two weeks.

“I was just off, I couldn’t sleep. If he was killed ... in these situations we need the skills to know how to talk to people, how to write and who to approach to try and help when people are being killed or arrested.”

Marama hopes that one day the OSGA will have an office space close to the city so they can have their resources in one central place, hold meetings and events, and engage with the broader Australian community.

“Our organisation is a resource. We are grassroots ambassadors linking local communities with government, making stable communities and educating young people. The young people are very engaged.”

In the future Marama would like the OSGA to be better resourced with funding and skilled people to continue the work. He wants to develop a stronger partnership with government to align their overseas advocacy activities and domestic interests and be recognised as an official voice.

“We would like to be a respected institution that represents Horn of Africa issues on human rights and peace.”

Taking on the Challenge – Building the Diaspora Learning Network

This year was a busy year for the Diaspora Learning Network (DLN). Building on the momentum generated by the first Diasporas in Action conference in 2016, the DLN started to establish itself in the second half of 2017 by forming its membership base.

The Network actively built its membership with the intent to facilitate cross-sector dialogue and promote the role of diasporas in peacebuilding, development and humanitarian response. By June 2018, the network counted 108 people, 57 of whom identify themselves as diaspora. The DLN membership is open to all stakeholders, i.e. diaspora representatives, NGOs, academia, institutions, private sector and government and it provides a platform to contribute and exchange ideas and experiences.

Establishing a membership base was also paramount to the delivery of three seminars. Between February and May, the DLN convened three fora to come up with practical suggestions and policy advice for the Australian government to support and strengthen diaspora efforts. Each seminar focused on a topical issue, i.e. peacebuilding and reconciliation, diaspora responses in times of disaster and other crisis and economic development.

The seminars built on the recognition of the significant role played by diasporas and the need to include communities' perspective in the policy discourse. Seminars' discussion and outputs fed into policy recommendation submitted to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in July. Overall, the seminars brought together 54 people representatives of different stakeholders and were supported by 22 volunteers.



Wesa Chau
Cultural Intelligence

“Sharing experience was very important. Discussion between individuals, groups and the participant as a whole was very important.” [Seminar 1 participants]

“Fantastic opportunity to hear from so many diverse diaspora representatives. I learnt a lot.” [Seminar 1 participants]



Nora Michael
Assyrian Aid Society

These exciting seminars did more than just provide policy recommendations. The fora were designed to foster a cross-sector dialogue and share knowledge and experiences. Participants indicated as their most significant learning Listening to existing initiatives and clearly articulated ideas for future improvement. As well as the interaction, meeting new people and conversation with others. I learnt that the government is getting engaged in the diaspora and their help to their people in the country of origin.

Encouraging collaboration between diasporas entrepreneurs, investors, community members, and organisations with government to identify brokers that can make strategy possible.

The discussion also iterated the added value of diaspora-led initiative “...a lot of the time diaspora communities have the capacity to make networks and contacts with communities in countries and have 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 1 Participant).



Abdullah Teia
Nuba Mountains Association of SA Inc.

The seminars proved that there is a great appetite for more knowledge on diasporas' action and a recognised need to establish collaborative initiatives. Learning about the different diaspora initiatives and how best to go about future activities. To also see that the barriers are the same and that Diasporas are active in reaching their end goals.

The DLN has taken the lessons learnt from the seminars and put them into the second Diasporas In Action international conference in September 2018. Another opportunity to build bridges and fill in the gaps.

The Diaspora Learning Network was driven by ACFID, Oxfam Australia, RDI Network, Refugee Council of Australia and Melbourne University and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.



Naresh Bhalla
GRC Dynamics Rty Ltd

Our team

Volunteers play a critical role in DAAs work. We are extremely fortunate to attract highly skilled volunteers from a wide range of professional backgrounds. Without them, DAA would not be able to respond to the ever increasing requests for community support. We thank them for their invaluable contributions to all aspects of our work.

We would particularly like to acknowledge the following volunteers who have performed ongoing and outstanding coordination roles for DAA over the past year:

Shany Ben Hur - Resource Mobilisation Coordinator
Peita Collard - HR/Volunteer Coordinator
Eliza de Brugh - Social Media Coordinator
Nimity James - Communications Coordinator
Elena Lobazova - Publications Coordinator
Lily Polak - Social Media Coordinator
Fiorenzo Polito - Volunteer Coordinator

Adikinyi Agimba

Alexandra Galo

Annabel Dixon

Cameron Deans

Claudia Vecchia

Constanza (Connie) Zehender

Delia Allen

Duane Rea

Elena Lobazova

Eliza De Burgh

Enzo (Ali Reza) Enzevae

Fiorenzo Polito

Ganiji Amandi

Harry Gajar

Ikemi Ivara

Jeanne Khin



Joel Khemis Musa

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Manas Sorte

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Sherryn Bowker

Sneha Vinod

Sumaiya Rizvi

Talia Daroesman

Tessa Pope

Yavor Stamenov

Yazmin Gonzalez Nieto

DAAs small but mighty paid staff team have been the backbone of the organisation. Their skill and expertise is matched only by their passion and commitment to our communities. As part time staff, they constantly juggle multiple projects, respond to ongoing community needs and stand ready to take on even more. We thank them for their tireless work and incredible impact in 2017/18.

Sandra Chestnutt - Community Engagement Coordinator
Sanne de Swart - Volunteer Coordinator
Lorenza Lazzati - DLN/Conference Coordinator
Manuela Ruhstaller - South Sudanese Peace Building Project Coordinator



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Youth Links

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