

Introduction

Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works with diaspora organisations, communities and groups in Australia that promote peace, development, humanitarian response and human rights in their country of origin.

As the peak national organisation for diaspora, DAA supports diaspora initiatives by providing resources, information and training, facilitating dialogue and shared learning, building networks and by amplifying diaspora voices at local, national and international levels. Since its beginning in 2009 DAA's programs have reached over 1,700 people and provided training and mentoring to more than 200 organisations.

As an ACFID Member, and accredited Code signatory, DAA fully supports the recommendations proposed in the ACFID Submission. We have worked with our community partners to develop a DAA Submission in order to highlight the opportunities associated with working in partnership with diaspora to achieve Australia's international aid objectives.

About diaspora

Diaspora communities play a significant and critical role in international development, humanitarian response and peacebuilding. Diaspora combine their unique knowledge of culture, country and history to develop sustainable strategies that have a lasting impact for communities. They are working in crisis zones long before international aid arrives and remain there long after it ends, often reaching areas that are inaccessible or deemed "unsafe" by international agencies.

Diaspora communities are considered transnational actors that operate across borders with a strong sense of civic responsibility, personal engagement and need-based intervention with regional or localised focus. Contrary to international agencies, diaspora communities tend to understand accountability based on social networks and trust. However, diaspora communities should not be thought of as a monolithic entity, they are political stakeholders and have vested interests in their country of origin practices and development.

Diaspora efforts and impact in peacebuilding, during times of crisis, disaster – both human induced and natural – and to develop businesses and trades are proven. Albeit, diaspora's peacebuilding efforts as well as their contribution to aid, development and trade are becoming increasingly more recognised by international actors, very little has been done to date to enhance and coordinate communities' efforts and harness their great potential.

Context: diaspora recognition in Australian policy

Foreign Policy White Paper

The Foreign Policy White Paper sees diaspora as one of the Foreign policy partners committing to "working with diaspora communities to promote

Australia's image and reputation, to encourage trade and investment and, where appropriate, to support our development assistance program."¹

The White Paper recognises the value of diaspora local knowledge and unique networks. Partnering with diaspora can help Australian Foreign aid to understand humanitarian issues in other countries while positively influencing how Australia is perceived internationally.

Government Engagement with civil society and diaspora communities

Government recognition of the value and need to engage with civil society is outlined in earlier publications and policies. The 2011 AusAID response to independent aid review highlighted in its recommendations the need to involve the Australian community at large to make greater use of the talents available in Australia² and DFAT NGO Engagement Framework includes diaspora groups as part of civil society³.

The government's commitment to engage with civil society and diaspora in aid and development is further reaffirmed by *DFAT Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014-2016*. The strategy expressed the need to engage with diaspora communities in Australia as a mean to strengthen Australia international cooperation. Further, it recognises the comparative advantage of diaspora communities' diplomacy and the need to draw from their linguistic skills, social networks and cultural community connections⁴. However, the strategy mainly refers to the Asian-born population in Australia, not to all Australian-based diaspora.

Diaspora Learning Network Policy Briefs

In 2018, the Diaspora Learning Network (DLN) as part of the *Diaspora Learning Network: furthering learning and multi-sectoral dialogue* project funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), NGO & Policy department, presented 3 policy briefs with recommendations on:

¹ Foreign Policy White Paper (2017), <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white->

² AusAID 2011, An Effective Aid Program for Australia. Making a real difference—Delivering real results, AusAID, downloaded 20 September 2011.
www.ausaid.gov.au/publications

³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) 2015, DFAT and NGOs Effective Development Partners, Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, DFAT and NGOs: Effective Development Partners Viewed 30 June 2019, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKewiD0fDo zuDjAhUXSX0KHf3TCjYQFjAAegQIAxAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdfat.gov.au%2Fabout-us%2Fpublications%2Fdocuments%2Fdfat-and-ngos-effective-development-partners.docx&usg=AOvVaw0_cIH3ScrgXNauNnagoLpt

⁴ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) 2014, Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014–16, DFAT, viewed 30 June 2019
<https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/Documents/public-diplomacy-strategy-2014-16.pdf>

- Peacebuilding and reconciliation⁵;
- Social and financial remittances (specifically how diaspora respond in times of disaster and other crises)⁶;
- The role of diasporas in economic development⁷.

The policy briefs were developed based on multi-stakeholder dialogues, which sought the participation of diaspora communities, NGOs, academics, private sector and government.

Inclusive growth

Participation and Partnership

The Foreign Policy White Paper recognises the essential need to build and develop partnership between all levels of government, businesses and civil society to amplify Australia's international influence and develop an effective foreign policy. To create positive impact, Australian Government's commitment to work with diaspora communities needs to develop better conditions and policy frameworks to amplify support and increase partnership opportunities.

“Diaspora communities and organisations need to be considered equal partners in the pursuit of development and humanitarian goals, whose complexity and distinctiveness should be recognised as a strength that brings added value to humanitarian and development responses”⁸. Diaspora communities utilise their local networks to develop targeted development and aid responses, enabling them to meet the unique and often time sensitive needs of affected communities overseas. They are flexible in their response, tailoring their projects to deliver the best possible outcomes for funders and community participants. They are also able to undertake real time risk assessments for project delivery, working closely with local communities and governing agencies to identify and minimise risk. These local networks, and remittances generated by connected communities, also enable them to deliver programs and aid responses at a significantly lower cost than INGOs while stimulating local economies.

Diaspora communities and organisations can bring skills and know-how where others struggle thanks to their contextual understanding of local political and humanitarian situations as well as their access to local communities. The establishment of effective

⁵ Seminar 1 report inclusive of policy brief can be viewed here http://diasporaaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018DLN_OutcomesReport_Seminar1.pdf

⁶ Seminar 2 report inclusive of policy brief can be viewed here <http://diasporaaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018DLNSeminar2OutcomesReportFINAL.pdf>

⁷ Seminar 3 report inclusive of policy brief can be viewed here http://diasporaaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018DLN_OutcomesReport_Seminar3.pdf

⁸ Diaspora Learning Network (2018), *Conference Outcome Report*, Diaspora Action Australia http://diasporaaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/DIA2018_Outcomes-report_web.pdf

partnerships and inclusive participation requires a concerted effort to create a policy environment that enables and supports diaspora communities and groups in flexible and sustainable ways.

DAA is the only organisation in Australia that provides support to diaspora communities to strengthen their impact overseas through increased capability, networking, coordination and advice. Diaspora development doesn't happen overnight – relationships of trust are built over time, capability is developed through ongoing support, impact is achieved through genuine partnerships.

Pacific

Australia's decision to "step up" in the Pacific can gain great advantage and success by developing a mutually beneficial partnership with Australian-based Pacific diaspora. At present there is a lack of resourcing and understanding of Pacific diaspora.

Pacific diaspora respond to natural disaster by providing community-led humanitarian response and a bottom-up approach that is culturally responsive to on the ground realities. Pacific humanitarianism is driven by a sense of solidarity that goes beyond family ties and geographical boundaries⁹. Understanding the uniqueness of Pacific diasporic response and embracing its inherent differences with traditional humanitarian actors can create opportunities to develop new alliances and networks that can positively impact future responses to natural disaster.

Recommendations

1. Invest in the capability, coordination and implementation of diaspora led development

The lack of financial support for DAA – Australia's peak national organisation for diaspora communities – since 2018 significantly reduces the opportunities for Federal Government to harness the unique, impactful and cost-effective efforts of diaspora responses in their home countries. Resourcing a coordination function would address ongoing frustrations of DFAT personnel and diaspora communities simultaneously. Duplication, contradictory advocacy platforms, multiple diaspora organisations and competing representations to Government make it increasingly difficult for productive relationships to form. Valuable reference models in terms of funding and activities are the Danish Refugee Council Diaspora Programme and the International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) sponsored by the US government.

⁹ Vivekanathan, J., Connors, P. (2019) *Crossing the Divide: Pacific Diaspora in Humanitarian Response To Natural Disasters*, Center for Humanitarian Leadership
https://centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Crossing-the-Divide_Pacific-diaspora-in-response-to-natural-disasters_Full-Report.pdf

2. Develop genuine and sustainable partnerships with diaspora communities for international development, diplomacy and policy

Diaspora communities in Australia are ideally placed to contribute to Australia's international development program, diplomacy and policy objectives. Investing in these relationships and demonstrating an openness to longer term partnerships would provide significant benefits to Federal Government. Supporting the leadership capabilities of diaspora leaders to increase their ability to engage in peacebuilding processes, aid and development would provide new opportunities. Young people and women have proven to be particularly effective in peacebuilding processes in the past.

3. Establish a targeted funding pathway for diaspora led development programs

While the Friendship Grants were established to provide opportunities for diaspora to secure DFAT funding for suitable offshore projects, the vast majority of these grants have been awarded to non-diaspora bodies. Flexible partnership funding opportunities are necessary to enable the unique approaches of diaspora communities in international development. Investing in diaspora led development projects acknowledges their legitimacy as international actors while providing opportunities for ongoing knowledge transference with Government.

4. Develop a targeted strategy to engage with Pacific diaspora communities

Pacific diaspora, like diaspora communities from any other region, strongly rely on ties based on trust, friendship and mutual benefit. Increased engagement with Pacific communities requires a contemporary understanding of the unique communities within the region, how they respond to disaster and how they meet community needs. A Pacific diaspora engagement strategy is required to ensure sustainable, productive and transparent relationships are established to benefit all parties.

5. Invest in research to document, and measure the impact of, diaspora led development

Recognition of diaspora communities as legitimate actors in international development has been hindered by a lack of understanding of their unique approach, and a lack of documented evidence of their significant impact. These gaps in evidence make it difficult for diaspora to attract non-Government funding for their projects and detracts from possible partnerships and collaborative approach to aid and development. The limited evidence-based research give raise to misinterpretation of diaspora contribution to the international development space. It also minimises opportunities to identify critical success factors and replicate them in other development settings.

DAA has developed a groundbreaking partnership with ACOM, University of Melbourne, Monash University, Settlement Services International and Refugee Council of Australia to work with diaspora communities to develop this critical evidence base. The partnership is supported by UNHCR, Red Cross, Oxfam, IOM, DFAT, Oxford University and Cambridge University as Advisory Group Members. The research project is yet to receive funding to proceed.