



Federation of Equatoria Community Association in Australia Inc.

ABN: 18 617 702 628 - ACNC 617 702 628 -

Web: www.fecaa.org.au

Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

27 July 2020

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for your invitation to provide a response into the *Inquiry into Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia*. I hereby submit, in the enclosed attachment, our views and recommendations.

In summary, the main concerns of the Equatoria community are around high unemployment rates, poor educational outcomes, and career stagnation amongst its members.

These issues are not only impacting members of the Equatoria community, but the vast majority of the immigrant communities. We think urgent policy intervention is required to design tailored programs that consider the understanding that the early settlement programs do not adequately assist these groups. We believe that designing remedial policy interventions will ensure a vast improvement for the groups that are to be targeted and that providing mechanisms whereby these groups can support themselves will make Australia a richer country.

Yours sincerely,

Juma Piri Piri
National President
Federation of Equatoria Community Association in Australia Inc (FECAA)

Attachment

Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee inquiry into issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

By Federation of Equatoria Community Association in Australia (FECAA) Inc., 28 July 2020

FECAA welcomes the opportunity to participate in this very important exercise of policy making process focusing on issues facing diaspora communities in Australia.

About FECAA

Founded in 2016, FECAA is a not-for-profit community organisation and the peak national body that represents the interests of the Equatorian community in Australia. Equatoria is one of three regions in the Republic of South Sudan and home to 34 of the 64 tribes of South Sudan.

Issues facing the Equatorian community in Australia

The Equatorian community, like other immigrant communities is faced with a number of challenges that threaten the longer-term prospects of sustained upwards socioeconomic mobility. These, if not addressed now, will have adverse impacts on the safety of the community and preclude the community from fully participating in Australia's economic prosperity.

High unemployment is a significant concern among the Equatorians. Those in the age group 40 and above, as well as women are most impacted. Most people in this group arrived in Australia as adults, and with less or non-functional proficiency in English language. Unfortunately, the early days of settlement in Australia did not have adequate training programs that could be tailored to the needs of this group.

The community being new itself in Australia also was not equipped to guide this group, to train or retrain such that they could acquire necessary skills suitable for the labour market in their newfound home. These factors conspired and hampered the ability of people in this group to take on jobs that were available at the time.

Women make up the second category that is hard hit by high unemployment. Their disadvantage is compounded by historical cultural practices that discouraged the education of young girls. As a result, a significant proportion of women in Equatoria community cannot write or read.

On arrival to Australia, the 510 hours of English as a Second Language (ESL) program did little to bring this group of people up to speed, as they did not have foundational elements from a formal education setting. Also, the program was not adequately resourced to cater for the differences that existed in the educational levels of the newly arrived immigrants. As a result, this group was not adequately assisted to gain and transition into sustainable employment or any employment as such.

The majority could not undertake formal training or retain information for longer-term skills at the end of ESL program because they were less proficient in the English language. As such, poor language skills have led to difficulties in navigating life in Australia.

We fear that if these issues are not addressed now, these groups will retire without the dignity of self-sufficiency and a lack of accumulated savings. They will continue to be burdensome on the community and stifle the economic progress of the younger generation. We have a concern that this will come at a significant cost both to the government and members of the community.

To address this problem from a community point of view, FECAA has embarked on a number of programs aimed at identifying talents from within the Equatoria community, to mentor and empower the vulnerable members of the community, and give them hope in life. FECAA organised three national conferences of Equatorian people over the past three years, to discuss these issues and canvass views of members on how to address these issues.

As of last year, FECAA has identified and established a network of State Coordinators in all but the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia, to better connect FECAA with Equatorian communities in the states and territories. FECAA has acquired office space in Melbourne, Sydney and a drop-in centre in Adelaide.

As a community organisation without a source of income, efforts by FECAA will not yield the results needed to improve the lives of these people. Therefore, we make the following recommendation to address the aforementioned concern.

Recommendation

- Design specific employment programs or pathways targeted to socially connect these groups and give them meaning, dignity of work and opportunities to earn and save for retirement.
- A specific example of such pathways could include a specially-designed, government-supported old age employment placement program implemented by community organisations.

Poor educational outcomes and career stagnation are also a significant concern, and if not addressed, these will jeopardise the progress made.

These phenomena impact young adults from age 20 and above. This group at the time of settlement was thought to be the beacon of hope for the community in our newfound home. However, as time went on, this has not been the case. With the exception of few bright ones, the majority fare poorly. The educational outcomes of this group are somewhat wanting, and there is therefore, a real concern that these poor outcomes will diminish the future employment and professional prospects of this group.

In hindsight, FECAA suspects the school placement system at the time of settlement of this group in Australia did not match with the capability this group came with. In some cases, the schools this group attended were not adequately resourced to support or tailor their programs to cater for this group. As previously stated, the community itself was also not resourced to support the learning and training of this group.

For those bright and fortunate enough to secure employment opportunities, they have oftentimes been hit by the phenomenon of career stagnation. After graduation this group easily transitioned into employment and did relatively very well. However, it is becoming apparent now that the progress the group has made is plateauing. This group faces challenges in transitioning into leadership and higher-paying roles within their professions.

To address these problems of poor educational outcomes and career stagnation, FECAA has been working with Equatorian communities at state and territory levels to offer tutoring programs to students and mentorship programs for those who are struggling to find jobs. Getting venues for such programs has been a challenge though. To solve this hurdle, FECAA is engaging other bodies including governments in the states to lease or offer properties such as the drop-in centre in Adelaide, to allow the community run their programs from.

As a long-term solutions to poor educational outcomes and career stagnation, FECAA recommends the following to the Committee.

Recommendations:

- Support for professional development and career progression opportunities for those whose career has stagnated to improve the prospects for career progression.
- Provide professional apprenticeship programs and other remedial programs to support those with poor educational outcomes to transition into employment.
- Professional mentorship programs with industry-specific leaders to aid bright, young professionals and university graduates in moving into leadership positions in the future.

While we aimed not to provide an exhaustive list of recommendations in this submission, we do believe that addressing the above-mentioned concerns will provide long-reaching encouragement to the Equatorian community. FECAA welcome any feedback that may be provided by the Committee and are committed to inputting into any potential programs, working with the Committee and other diaspora communities and implementing programs and initiatives within our capacity.

We would also like to express our gratitude for inviting us to input into this inquiry.