



Submission No 34

**Review of Australia's Relationship with the  
Countries of Africa**

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# Personal Submissions to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs *Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa*

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First, I am involved with a wide range of community membership; I am the Vice President of the African Studies Association of the Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) a national academic body, and an Executive Member of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) (State peak body) and Vice President of the Ethnic Council of Shepparton & Districts (Regional). A charter member of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Executive Board member of the African Think Tank Inc., and the Eastern and Central Africa Communities of Victoria (EACACOV) (State-wide Organisations) as well President of GV African Communities Association and Public Officer/Treasurer of the GV Ethnic Professionals Association (GVEPA).

Currently, I am lecturing in the School of Management at La Trobe University and a member of the Institute of Human Security co-ordination those doing any research work on Africa and Africans in the University. In regard to education delivery, I have taught various courses in Management, researched and published books and in various journals mainly in regard to effective and efficient delivery of settlement services to 'emerging communities' particularly African-Australians in Victoria -Australia. I have recently developed and published a capacity building model for African-Australians settling in regional Australia. At present, I am leading a team undertaking a major project in the Goulburn Valley Victoria aimed at minimising wastage in the utilisation of the migrants' Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs). This research project also aims to suggest how such KSAs could be used as a spring board for new economic and social contribution to the region and the migrants' them-selves. In past, I have lead a team that mapped, evaluated, and benchmarked for betterment of the settlement services delivery to the Africans Communities in Victoria, my report which later was published into a book both are part of the resources being used in the regards.

My work has been recognised both internationally and nationally resulting into being listed under "Maquis of Who's who in the World", and on similar grounds the Victoria State Government has twice awarded me. In 2006 I was awarded for an Outstanding Contribution to the Community and in 2008 the Victorian Refugee Recognition Record (VRRR) Award; also I am "Justice of the Peace" in Victoria. On the Australian Day 2009, the City of Greater Shepparton (COGS) awarded me with "An Academic Contribution Award to the Community" which was recognition of my use of the academic standing, research, and community engagement to make a significant contribution the GV emerging communities and African-Australians in particular.

I am an Associate Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management, Member of the Asia Pacific Human Resource Institute, Fellow and Executive Member of the Asian Forum for Business Education (AFBE), Editorial Board of AFBE Journal and Editorial Board member of the Australasian Review of African Studies, an academic Journal published by the African Studies Association of Australasia and The Pacific. The above experience suggests that I have reasonable knowledge in regard to issues between Africa and Australia.

Key suggestions that can be summarised in following points:

- (1) What Africa and Africans can contribute to Australia and vice versa needs more articulation especially to the Australian general public; who need improved knowledge about the realities.
- (2) Much of what is emphasised more openly even by governments in the dealings with Africa is aid and humanitarian programs not trade. The latter is mainly in mining areas which is kept private and to the respective corporations, thus the contributions generally are publically unknown unlike such from China, India, or other Asian or European countries (continents).
- (3) In the new globalised environment the perspectives as portrayed two points above need to be changed. Therefore, the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs *Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa* should suggest strategies for changing and improvements.
- (4) African countries are also seeking new forms of dealings and developments in the new world order; they many times hit hard walls perpetuated by the older issues within international and other forms of global relations. This problem is very clear if one examines what is meant by “millennium goals” and how the goals would be achieved.
- (5) Australian governments should not only encourage increasing scholarships for students to study in Australia, other forms of scholarly sharing should be part and parcel. For example, encourage teaching African courses in Australian Institutions, joint research academic studies, twin or complementary degree and other programs, exchange programs, and encourage that knowledge from an African perspective is as important like any other knowledge from elsewhere. In this regard there should be serious research into the costs and benefits of Australia's involvement with Africa, thus development of an African Research Institute in Australia.

## **Backward Notes**

Australians generally appeared less and less interested in Africa and Africans issues in the late 1980s and early 1990's. Mainly after the fierce struggle against apartheid was ending and the Australian Government was looking more towards Asia. The 1997 Simons' Report recommended a narrowing of Australia's bilateral aid to Africa to only South Africa and Mozambique. In 2001 Gavin Kitchen (2000:26) concluded that 'The welfare of Africa and its people is a matter of remote concern for the governments of Australia and New Zealand and probably always will be.'

One protest against the trend was the excellent 1999 NGO Position Paper on Africa, *Ubuntu* (ACFOA 1999) which is still available online. This report notes that Australia's Overseas

Development Assistance globally had fallen by 40% in the 1991-1996 period and that whereas 34% of Australian NGO funds were directed to Africa, only 6% of AusAID funds were.

In 1998 Professor Cherry Gertzel commented on the declining number of African based courses at Australian Universities. Five years later, Lyons and Dimock (2003:1) wrote that 'African studies in Australia are under siege'. A personal communication from Dr John Ballard describes the situation at The Australian National University where a Development Studies major was set up in 1981, offering regional specialisations in Africa and Asia. By the end of the 1980's the Africa option became unviable when he and Ian Hancock moved to other courses. Ironically there is now some demand for courses with an African content.

Lyons and Dimock (2003:1) estimate that in 2003 only ten academics were teaching topics related to Africa. Since then the number of courses offered may well have diminished because of deaths and retirements. A minor reversal to this national downsizing occurred in 2009 with a new appointment in the History program at La Trobe. Dr Roland Burke's thesis had centred on South Africa and he was expected to be teaching a course on South Africa.

Several years ago, I wrote a note about the distinguished contribution of the Demography Program at the ANU to African population studies in the previous four decades (Lucas 2003). One reason for this success was that Demography was able to undertake joint research in Africa with graduates from our Department who had risen to senior positions in their home institutions. As AusAID scholarships diminished in the 1990s, so did these links. I anticipate that by mid-2010 we will have no African Demography students at all.

The disappearance of the Africa Research Institute at La Trobe circa 2006 was another setback, although this was soon followed by the *Proposal for the Establishment of the Monash Africa Research Institute* (MARI),

<http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/execserv/academic-board/-private/proposal-for-mari.pdf>

A paper by Fahey (2008) further defines Monash's proposed sphere of influence. However an internal restructure in 2009 at Monash might have meant a temporary loss of momentum for this initiative.

### **Australia and Africa; Costs and Benefits**

Kitchen's judgement above, about lack of government interest, may have seemed largely true at the time but recently there are at least six trends that should modify his judgement. In this section, I discuss these recent changes, and relate them to an important research question, which needs serious study, which is whether Australia gains more from Africa than it gives.

1. Firstly, the Government has an on-going commitment to increase ODA to 0.5% of Gross National Income by 2015-16. The 2009-10 International Development Assistance Budget Media Release (AusAID 2009) highlighted an increase in ODA to Africa, with more scholarships for Africans and an emphasis on progress towards the Millenium Development Goals. See

[http://www.aid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID=5854\\_3696\\_6753\\_7484\\_7221](http://www.aid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID=5854_3696_6753_7484_7221)

*If the ODA sceptics (see Baird 2009), are ignored), then this increase must be a positive development, although Australian companies, institutions, and individuals supplying related goods and services will also benefit.*

2. Several major Australian NGOs have had a continuous presence in Africa for decades, and Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) monitors the spending of its members and Code of Conduct signatories. In 2008 about one third of funds donated by the Australian community went to Africa. See: <http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources/facts-and-figures/regional-distribution-of-aid-funds>

*However this neglects the surprising current involvement of Australian individuals and minor NGOs in Africa. For example, the **Canberra Times** recently described fund raising for the Empower program initiated by Australian doctor Robi Sonderegger in 2004 for children affected by the civil war in northern Uganda (Mills 2009). The Macquarie Group Foundation (2009) funds at least 10 African NGOs.*

*Of course the contribution of any NGO to Africa must be net of its administrative costs in Australia.*

3. There has been increasing recognition of the involvement of Australian mining companies in Africa during the mining boom. According to Donnelly and Ford (2008:vii), 'From very little at the beginning of the decade, actual and prospective investment by Australian companies in the SSA resource sector has climbed to A\$20 billion...'

*These companies are taking risks but they are also extracting non-renewal resources. What needs to be known here is what these companies take out of Africa as profits, their impact on the environment, and what they put back in terms of taxes, training and development, and fulfilling their social corporate responsibilities. Furthermore, these companies might also have a negative impact if they are, through bribery and corruption, supporting undemocratic regimes.*

*Criticism of Australian companies by the Australian media seems muted, perhaps because of a lack of information. For example, Bromby (2009), failed in his efforts to contact an Australian company involved in 'some alleged African argy-bargy over a potash project in Republic of Congo..' In October, 2009, the British magazine, **Private Eye**,(1246:28) criticized two Australian companies, one for links with Trafigura, a commodities dealer accused of illegal dumping, and one for selling uranium to India.*

4. Fourthly, the number of Africans in Australia and New Zealand increased by around one-third between 2001 and 2006 (2008b: Lucas 2008c) and this influx led to more research on African Australians, as evidenced by the programmes for the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> AFSAAP Conferences.

*Although African countries may benefit from remittances that the migrants send home, the negative effect is that African countries are being stripped of their human resources (Kalule-Sabiti et al., 2003). Between 1996 and 2001 the number of South Africa- born persons in Australia who were employed in managerial, professional and associate professionals rose from 17,484 to 26,655, that is by more than 50% (Lucas et al. 2006:57). In general Australia gets a massive benefit because the costs of their education were met in their country of origin.*

*Aid policies which emphasise 'building capacity' and 'good governance' may be in conflict with Australia's immigration policies that seek skilled migrants, sometimes to offset its shortcomings in human resource development (Kalule-Sabiti et al., 2003: 127).*

5. There are several thousand African students at tertiary institutions at Australian institutes, either as private students, or funded by their governments. In 2006/7 alone around 5,500 new student visas

were issued to persons holding passports from African countries. Countries contributing more than 10% of this total were Mauritius, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Egypt.

*The tertiary sector has obviously gained from the fees of overseas students. Even if the Government's target of 1,000 African scholarships by 2012/3 they will be outnumbered by private and government-sponsored students.*

6. Finally, at the international level, conditions deteriorated very rapidly in some areas, notably Sudan and Zimbabwe which became the objects of world attention. Somalia joined the list as a perceived threat to world peace through piracy and as a training ground for terrorists. More recently it was recognised that African countries were numerically important in the United Nations,

*Australia's role here must be positive, for example with aid to Zimbabwe. Sometimes a quid pro quo may be implied, as with Rwanda obtaining membership of the Commonwealth and supporting Australia's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council.*

### **The Need for Cooperation**

Greater cooperation and inter-action between Universities, business, diplomats and NGOs is needed. An example of successful cooperation was the lecture at the ANU by Archbishop Ncube, who visited Australia from Zimbabwe under DFAT's auspices in 2007. Almost 200 people attended because of cooperation between AFSAAP, the ANU's Centre for International Justice and the Commonwealth Round Table.

On the other hand, the Australia Africa Business Council held its annual conference in the Gold Coast, Brisbane, with the Queensland Government as its major sponsor, while AFSAAP held its conference in Brisbane later in the month. The original focus of the Australia Africa Business Council was southern Africa, but there is now a Nigeria-Australia Council, perhaps implying that the needs of West Africa were not being met.

The AFSAAP conferences have had several papers on the mining, and at the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference welcome from Tokyo, the Zambian High Commission to Australia, H.E. Godfrey Simasaku who spoke about the Australian companies operating in Zambia. However although a representative from a major mining company was due to speak at the 31<sup>st</sup> AFSAAP conference, they did not turn up. I cannot remember when a representative from a major NGO last addressed an AFSAAP conference.

I think too that Universities are becoming more involved in self-promotion, which works against cooperation in the tertiary education sector. Furthermore, African Studies are fragmented and sometimes hidden within thematic University courses on, for example, poverty or health. A Centre of Excellence and an African Update, as suggested below, would be means of encouraging an exchange of ideas and facilitate an inventory of teaching and research activities.

### **Contacts in Canberra**

#### Parliament

Unlike the UK Parliament, it is not easy to find out which Parliamentarians are interested in Africa. The British Parliament has a Register of All- Party Groups divided into two sections, Country Groups and Subject Groups. The former ranges from 'Africa' to 'Zimbabwe' with the purpose of the

Africa group being 'To raise the profile of African and pan-African issues in Parliament'. The Subject Groups include 'Great Lakes Region and the Prevention of Genocide'.  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/register.pdf>

#### Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Because of the previous lack of interest in Africa, the most senior diplomats have little experience of Africa. This reflects a past of a tendency to appoint Heads of Mission to Africa who were not career diplomats or who were reaching the end of their careers. An example is Ed Ride who was posted to Lusaka even though he was suffering from Parkinson's disease (Ride 1991). Hopefully African expertise will build up over time as the current Heads of Mission in Africa advance their careers.

#### AusAID

AusAID is similar to DFAT in that senior staff are unlikely to have any African experience. In the past personal contacts have been difficult to maintain because of staff mobility and turnover; and most of staff working on Africa have been new to the area. It is hoped that this will change with the strengthening of the Africa Section of AusAID and the creation of an Africa branch in DFAT.

#### African Diplomats

The African Heads of Mission meet regularly in Canberra and are generally supportive of the activities of organisations concerned with Africa. The previous Dean, H.E. Mr. John Lenyasunya, at his farewell organised by the ACT Chapter of the Australia Africa Business Council, urged support of AFSAAP. Africa High Commissioners have addressed both AFSAAP conferences and AABC meetings.

#### **Universities**

Searching for 'Africa' on the University of Oxford website ([www.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ox.ac.uk)), you learn that 'Oxford university graduates have been active in African affairs for several centuries.' A recent development is the MSc in African Studies which began in 2006. Oxford also has more than 150 students in the Humanities and Social Sciences registered for doctoral degrees in African topics.

Although Australia may be hard pressed to match Oxford, with its head start of several centuries, Australian Universities as a whole probably do quite well in the African Studies, it's just that their efforts are hard to measure.

I was amused to find a photo from the ANU's *Staff News* in 1995 with the heading 'South Africa looks to ANU'. According to the caption, the ANU's Vice Chancellor, in addressing South Africa's Deputy President, F.W. de Klerk, said that the ANU hoped for collaborative research projects, and to promote exchanges, attachments and secondments of staff. Well, if anything happened, I didn't hear about it. Finding out about African students and research at many Universities is quite a serious problem; it would probably mean looking at the webpage of each department and then at the titles of doctoral and other research, which may or may not reveal that a topic concerns Africa.

#### **The Need for a Centre of Excellence**

Australia needs a Centre of Excellence devoted to current African Studies, with headed by at least one Professor of Africa Studies. To the best of my knowledge there is only one University staff

member in Australia with 'Africa' in their title, that is Caroline Mullins at Sydney University who is Program Officer, International Agencies and Africa.

One of the last acts of Victor Smorgon, who died in 2009 aged 96, was to endow the Chair of Jewish Studies at Monash University (Main 2009). There are several rich South Africans in Australia but they are perhaps too young to consider endowing a chair of African Studies. The new chair of Africa Development at the London School of Economics was funded partly by the LSE and partly by donations from alumni, once again possible but unlikely in Australia. See <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/supportingLSE/pdfs/impactSpring2009.pdf>

The title of the LSE chair should be noted, and the post was filled by Professor Mkandawire, a development economist. Australia has strengths in African history and politics but the Centre should lean towards 'hands on' experience in Africa, with agriculture as a key sector in which Australia has expertise. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, which has completed over 40 projects in southern Africa since 1983 (see <http://www.aciar.gov.au/country/South+Africa>) while the Crawford Fund (2008) has drawn attention to the need for aid to Africa to improve food security. A 'hands on' area of research in which Australia needs more knowledge is micro-finance. Hayward-Jones (2008:3) has written that 'The British government in cooperation with key African governments has mobilised the leaders of major international companies to invest in Africa, to create employment opportunities, improve the quality of supply chains, help local companies to become internationally competitive and introduce innovation and technology.'

### **An African Update?**

Around ten years ago Kitchen (2000:26) recommended 'a major high-profile Round Table' on (say) 'The Crisis in Africa'. An Update could show what progress some parts of Africa have made since 2000, and provide an opportunity for Africanists to exchange ideas and discuss collaboration.

At the 2006 AFSAAP General Meeting I received support for the idea of a one-day Africa Update, modelled on the Updates currently given at the ANU and elsewhere on Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and other countries. However these Updates need funding, from AusAID, a multinational or a University. I am still hoping that the first could be held in 2011.

When I met Bob McMullan in February, 2009, he was encouraging but suggested testing the waters before planning a full day event. So, with the unanimous support of the African Heads of Mission, a lecture/panel discussion will be held at the ANU on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, to discuss 'The future of Australia's relationship with Africa'. The Dean of the African Heads of Mission, H.E. Mrs Marie-France Roussety, is chairing a small planning committee, which includes representatives of AFSAAP, the ANU, the Commonwealth Round Table and the ACT Chapter of the Australia Africa Business Council. This demonstrates a degree of cooperation that is often lacking in other Africa-related activities.

### **Postscript**

I am consistently being surprised by the new information I receive about Australia and Africa. Last Saturday I read that two PhDs had been granted by a university in Australia for work on Africa, of which I was unaware. This morning I read for the first time about the Australian Africa Children's Aid Support Association (Low 2009) and received a message from the Director of Environmental



Programs at the University of Melbourne, saying that his course on Africa's environment had over a hundred students. Last month Victoria University of Technology has been raising like sentiments.

I am sure that this Inquiry will greatly enhance our knowledge of who in Australia is involved in Africa.

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