



Submission No 45

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

**Name:** Professor Helen Ware

**Organisation:** Private Submission

## AFRICAN SUBMISSION

This submission is based on my experience as an Australian academic and also on insights gained during two decades of working as a senior Australian bureaucrat in positions dealing with developing countries both within AusAID and elsewhere in the bureaucracy . I was former Australian High Commissioner to Zambia, Malawi and Namibia and Ambassador to Angola. Earlier I was involved in training African social researchers and policy advisors in 12 African countries. Currently I am engaged in researching issues related to peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa and supervise PhD students from Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone who are studying peace issues at the University of New England in Armidale.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Africa is unlikely to ever be a major Australian preoccupation. That said, our engagement with the countries of the Continent could be much more focused and effective than it has been to date.

Evidently we should not leave the relationship to languish except when we are trying to get ourselves elected to the UN Security Council. Africans can see the hypocrisy of this on-and-off-again approach and distrust us because of it.

We need to choose a small number of areas to focus on and continue to develop them so that their mutual beneficial impact increases exponentially over time.

There would appear to be five promising areas for such an approach: agriculture; mining; refugees; peace keeping and training.

### **TOR 2: ECONOMIC ISSUES**

#### **MINING: MORE THAN AN ECONOMIC ISSUE**

Australian mining interests in Africa are extensive and largely an issue for the companies involved. Yet, Australia does have a responsibility to ensure that mining companies based in Australia are responsible international players. A recent edition of African Renewal (April 2009) high- lighted a health clinic partially funded by Australian mining company BHP Biliton in Mozambique as an example of more mining projects including direct benefits to local communities. However, social responsibility by mining companies requires more than support to local activities. Oxfam Australia has made an extensive submission to this inquiry which covers mining issues at length. Whilst I would support most of Oxfam’s recommendations (although some could be more felicitously expressed) their sheer volume might well mean that

individual recommendations receive limited attention. Priority should be given to  
Recommendation 1: Foster a corporate culture and investment environment that values protection of, and respect for human rights as an integral part of doing business.

Given that there are a significant number of small to medium Australian businesses involved in mining , it would appear appropriate to focus on these businesses who are likely to be less well informed (or indeed naïve) concerning the particular human rights issues associated with mining in Africa as compared with the major multinational corporations, who may indeed be better informed than the Australian government. Austrade sponsored Update Seminars on these issues in relation to particular countries and conflict regions should be an important resource for business and observer NGOs alike. The Australian Government should do more to publicize the Framework for Responsible Mining and other such mining codes which are being developed to ensure that mining supported by outside interests is not the continuing cause of conflict and bloody exploitation in Africa (see also Oxfam Submission 39)..

## AGRICULTURE

Currently the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is examining the prospects for assisting with agriculture in Africa. There are at least two areas where they have acknowledged Australian expertise as leading the world: livestock genetics and agricultural economics. Whilst livestock genetics may find a business market, impartial advice to African governments on agricultural policy will probably need to be funded via AusAID (see below).

## **TOR 3: EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS**

In the past, as several other submissions have noted (e.g. Dr Lucas Submission 22), educational relations between Australia and Africa, often under Commonwealth auspices, used to be much stronger than they are now. In 1971 on a remote section of the Ghana/Ivory Coast Border I was assisted by a customs official who had trained in Australia – which would be unthinkable today. There are problems at both ends: fewer Australian academics who know anything about Africa and fewer Africans who have come to know and appreciate Australia through having been trained here. There is also the additional issue of the lack of Australians with the experience/knowledge to understand the cultures from which the African refugees/humanitarian migrants have come. At least one Australian University should have a

Centre for African Studies. If Australia wishes to be considered a world player, we cannot ignore a whole continent.

Australian Universities should also do more to maintain links with former students from Africa. Australian Universities are generally poor in maintaining alumni links (in comparison say with US universities) but this is a particular problem in the case of African graduates from poor countries who are unlikely to be able to self-fund return visits to their host institutions. In those few African countries where we do have diplomatic representation, an annual Australian graduates day with a forum for information exchange followed by a party would be well worth the modest investment of time and resources required to discover, for example, that the local Secretary for Agriculture has an Australian Masters Degree.

One positive impact which this Inquiry has already had is to inspire Australian Universities to devote greater thought to combining and exchanging information on what they are currently doing in relation to Africa. The University of New England has had an African Interest Group for some years now, but to date the lack of Australian government interest in Africa has meant that it has looked to overseas funding sources such as the World Bank. An annual Australian up-date in a State capital, funded by AusAID as they fund PNG and Indonesian updates ( which could invite all Heads of Mission from African countries who are based in Australia) would advance the exchange of information between academics and bureaucrats and help to modify the tendency of the bureaucracy to think largely in terms of Canberra based academics when thinking of linkages.

#### **TOR 4: DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

Given the current system for funding Australian Tertiary institutions, a substantial proportion of the training of Africans in Australia is likely to be funded by the Commonwealth Government and usually through the aid programme. Whilst funding of grass-roots NGO projects on the ground is meritorious and can have considerable local impact (see, for example, World Vision's Submission 31), targeting training provision will usually have a greater long-term impact (provided that the trainees return to stay in Africa). Targeted training is likely to have the greatest impact if it is provided at a senior level. Some time ago AusAID funded a programme of leadership and governance training for the Secretaries of Education of a number of countries in Southern Africa. The annual sessions of the programme rotated from capital to capital and had considerable regional impact. One area where another such high level programme might have a helpful impact might be in providing training and support for Heads of Taxation Offices in Africa who understandably tend to be rather isolated. Yet any improvement to the effectiveness and fairness of taxation collection are obviously of great benefit to poor countries

where the elites frequently leave the poor to bear the tax burden. It is notable that AusAID did not make an early submission to the Inquiry, with result that information on all of its programmes which affect Africa is not readily available in one place.

The importance of agricultural economics has been noted above. Again, an Australian contribution in this area would be very valuable given our expertise and the importance of agriculture to still predominantly rural communities, both in terms of feeding the nation and of providing a reliable income stream to the rural population. The recent coup in Niger provides yet another example of the link between wrong choices in agricultural policy and governmental instability. A relatively small input in training in agricultural policy making can make a very significant contribution – yet (for reasons related to the jealousies of economists in the first world) this has been an area largely neglected by other donors.

## **TOR 5: DEFENCE CO-OPERATION**

Direct defence co-operation with individual African countries raises many difficult issues which are best avoided by working under United Nations or other multi-lateral auspices. Our current “modest defence relationship with Uganda” is noted in the Defence Department’s submission (No.30) to this Inquiry. Such a bilateral relationship with a defence force which has been involved in some highly questionable excursions can raise serious human rights concerns, which may be further highlighted when inviting delegations on official visits to Australia. In such cases, it may become a question of balancing association with individuals with somewhat spotted reputations with the prospect of being able to raise standards among their colleagues through joint training opportunities etc. One possibility, which might be worth considering, could be to concentrate on specific, less contested areas, such as maintaining the physical and mental health of the troops or addressing gender issues encountered both within defence forces and in the field on peacekeeping missions.

Submission 30 also quotes the 2009 Defence White Paper as noting “it will remain in Australia’s interests to encourage peace and stability in Africa as part of our contribution to global security. Through targeted defence cooperation and capacity building in areas such as peacekeeping, these efforts will contribute to Africa’s capacity to manage its security”. The submission also explains that “planning is underway to establish a New Defence Attache to the African Union”. It is to be hoped that this forward looking move is to be an additional commitment and not, say, at the expense of Australia’s defence co-operation with the neighbouring Pacific.

In the context of current peacekeeping operations, it might also be worth considering relationships between African police forces and their Australian counterparts. The Victorian Police Force is to be congratulated for having sent members of the force to Southern Sudan to familiarize themselves with the largely lawless conditions from which many refugees come. This is rather different to the peacekeeping context, but does demonstrate the outward vision of some of our police.

Overall, it should be noted that, whilst the engagement of significant numbers of Australian troops as peacekeepers is subject to major resource constraints, sending very small numbers to plug particular technical and logistic needs can be very effective both in terms of cost benefits and of establishing important linkages. Also, as the Department of Defence is already aware (Submission 30) engaging in modest mutual training activities can bring significant returns in demonstrating best practice and in demonstrating that Australia does care about Africa's on-going problems.

Currently the University of New England is providing training in peace studies to a number of post-graduate students, one of whom is studying how the African Union's Peacekeeping activities can be made more effective, including through greater access to international training with a possible role for Australia.

## **TOR 6: MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES:**

### **REFUGEES, BRAIN DRAIN AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS**

On the migration front, Australia's relationships with several African countries are complicated by the fact that most African immigrants to Australia are either refugees/humanitarian entrants or a part of the brain drain: in which Australia benefits from the human resource development and training paid for by poor African countries, but put to work in Australia. In neither case is the African country of origin likely to be very happy with the circumstances under which its citizens left.

In the case of Africans who have fled their countries of origin before applying to come to Australia as refugees/ humanitarian entrants we often do not have amicable relationships with their home governments. However we need to bear in mind that the home government may well change and at that point we should remember to work with those Africans who have become Australian citizens, some of whom may well chose to return home to take up positions with the new government, to build up good relationships with their countries of origin. We need to take especial care that Africans who come to Australia with little or no formal education are able to catch up and do not become an underclass here. (In this context, the

variety of information which it is necessary to absorb to understand the details of available state and federal services is challenging to this Australian university professor, let alone to a scared and non-literate refugee with minimal English).

In the case of the negative aspects of the brain drain, there is the counter argument that sending countries can benefit through the remittances sent home by professionals working overseas. In the medical sphere, an argument could possibly be made for a poor country training more nurses than it needs and then 'exporting' the surplus as a means of securing foreign exchange. However, no African country has, or will have in the foreseeable future, anything like a surplus of medical doctors and doctors are exceptionally expensive to train. If Australia is to accept physicians emigrating from Africa we should think very carefully about our responsibility for contributing to the training of their replacements, for example by using the aid programme to fund Australians to teach in medical schools in Africa (together with necessary support to African medical schools more generally) and to allow such teachers to nominate Africans they have worked with in Africa to come for specialized training in Australia. The Japanese have a tradition of such joint programmes and have demonstrated that the reciprocal personal links built up in this way have an excellent multiplier effect in enhancing the value of the training.

Refugees, humanitarian entrants and other immigrants inevitably form strong bonds between Africa and Australia. However, as we are currently learning in the case of our relationships with India, it is very important to have established links which will continue to work effectively even when some aspects of the relationship turn sour. I am currently President of Sanctuary Armidale, an organization which works with humanitarian entrants most of whom have come from Sudan. Many of these African immigrants face significant problems, not least in dealing with the inscrutable ways of the Department of Immigration, especially when trying to bring out other family members. It would be very helpful to have one number within the Department of Immigration and Citizenship which African refugees/humanitarian entrants and their sponsors could ring and have the rules explained to them. These rules should also, of course, be available in written form. Currently what causes so much anguish for people who are often already traumatised with the additional potential for bad blood is the fact that X's cousin is allowed in from Refugee camp KK whilst Y's cousin is not, even though, to both the Africans and the Australian NGOs trying to assist them their circumstances appear identical. The current rumour is that the granting of a visa depends entirely on the day of the month the application form lands on the official's desk. We should not preach transparency to African governments and then operate an immigration programme for the Global Special Humanitarian Visa Subclass 202 which is so opaque. If the system really is a lottery, then we should have the honesty to say so. Everyone involved understands that we cannot take every refugee from every camp – what they do not understand is how we select the minute fraction that we do take.

We also need to consider how we deal in diplomatic terms with those countries of origin from which we are accepting refugees/ humanitarian entrants. Sudan could form an excellent case study.