

DIASPORA RESPONSES IN TIMES OF DISASTER AND OTHER CRISIS OUTCOMES REPORT



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Part 1: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This seminar was jointly organised by the Diaspora Learning Network, with support from DFAT, and was hosted by the Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative (HADRI) at Western Sydney University. The seminar focused on the role of diasporas in providing financial and social assistance through knowledge, norms and values to their country of origin and host countries.

Introduction, Louise Olliff - *Refugee Council of Australia & Diaspora Learning Network*

- Louise introduced what a 'diaspora' is - diasporas can be refugees and other migrants living in Australia, who are connected to another country, and support their family in that country.
- The definition of diaspora is a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale.
- People who come to Australia as migrants or refugees connect with communities and when there are disasters back home they help.
- Diaspora engagement isn't always about money it's about emotional support, advocacy and networking with diasporas in other countries. Material and non-material help, sharing hope and knowledge rather than just sending money, and there are many different groups that respond.
- Australia is a nation of migrants so we can come together about how help can be better.
- As people are more dispersed there is more thought about connecting with those other nations.
- Diasporas need to be stakeholders in conversations about migration.
- A diaspora community shares 'a feeling of belonging to a homeland'.
- Diasporas need to be a stakeholder in conversations about diaspora responses.

"There is no homogenous diaspora community, rather there are different groups of people who choose to respond"

Seminar participant

 **Twitter quote by Prof. Andre Renzaho @andre_mrenzaho**

*Migration policies & the brain drain- 6 R's:
Return of migrants to their source country;
Restriction of international mobility;
Recruitment of international migrants;
Reparation for loss of human capital;
Resourcing expatriates (Diaspora option);
Retention of graduates*

*"It's what makes people a diaspora,
It's a feeling of belonging"*

Seminar participant

Welcome by Professor Andre Rezhano, Western Sydney University

Welcome everyone to the forum and talked about what diasporas can do. They normally talk about what they do in countries of origin but it is important to build support in the country they are in. (Suggested further reading 'Global migration and health' by Professor Andre Renzaho)

He introduced the idea of brain drain/brain circulation and brain gain with:

- The number of highly educated migrants moving from low-income to high-income countries
- Increase in the ageing population in OECD countries is accompanied by a decrease in a working-age population
- 63% of the 57 poorest countries experiencing a critical shortage of health workers worldwide are located in the African continent. Africa accounts for 25% of the world's disease burden, but has only 3% of the world's health workers, and 1% of the world's economic resources to meet the challenge
- The movement of skilled workers out of their local area, to assist in developed countries – what does this do for their original homeland countries?

Social and economic impact in host countries:

- Workforce participation: menial jobs
- Economic impact: migrants as consumers, small business development and expansion, tourism, , diversification of the workforce and building host countries' long term productive capacity, bringing skills to host countries, paying taxes, population growth: replenishing workforce

Feedback effect: Brain gain through various diaspora options, e.g. technology transfer, remittances, links with international trade, foreign direct investment, etc. Induced effect: Stimulus to domestic education and demand for higher education. Small but positive skilled emigration rate of 5 to 10% can yield benefits with human capital accumulation maximised when the level of brain drain is around 10%

Migrants save money in host countries – opportunity for development if funds are sent to countries of origin

Remittances vs Foreign Aid

- The effect of remittances in stimulating the economy is 6-7 times higher than that of foreign aid
- Difficult to maximise the effect of remittances, e.g. loose relationship between remittances and terrorism

Diaspora response in Complex Emergencies (see also Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination)

- ▶ Syrian Diaspora Dispatching food aid & Disseminating medical supplies
- ▶ The Somali Diaspora in WATSAN projects
- ▶ The Sierra Leonean diaspora played a big role in response to Ebola outbreak

The absence of a coordinated response is one of the main concerns for the diaspora's efforts

He noted that there are a number of policy options: *The Six 'Rs'* (Lowell 2002)

- Return of migrants to their source country, to cultivate human capital for source countries
- Restriction of international mobility, policies that make it difficult for nationals to take jobs abroad
- Recruitment of international migrants – brain drain circulation
- Reparation for loss of human capital (tax) – monetary compensation
- Resourcing expatriates (diaspora options), harnessing the skills and resources of D
- Retention through educational sector policies and economic development

“Australia is a land of migrants, of diasporas, there is a wealth of knowledge there”

Seminar participant

PART 2: DIASPORA PRESENTATIONS

Presentations Questions:

- Using an example from your own experience, what do diasporas do to help in times of disaster or crisis?
- How does context shape the way that communities respond? For example, what is possible in a certain situation.
- How do people from your community decide what to do and how to get involved? I.e. How do people help in different ways?
- Practice religion without fear of persecution
- ASS was created in response to the Gulf War & commends the Australian government for the support it has provided to Iraq



**Twitter quote by Nichole Georgeou
@NicholeGeorgeou**

Nora Michael from Assyrian Aid Society speaking about how context shapes how diaspora communities respond during times of crisis @DiasporaAction @westsydunews @migratorymel #diaspora #DLN2018

"We are unified in that we have the same purpose, to provide assistance towards the Assyrians living in our homeland"

Seminar participant

- Unification of work of ASS committees - cohesion of purpose means that survival of people in original homeland can continue.
- Diasporas were instrumental in supporting families to escape the unrest in Iraq and return safely through the provision of relief packages. Without this support, survival rate of people would be tragic.
- No government support until recent times - government funds did not filter down to the people who needed them.

Ms Nora Michael, Assyrian Aid Society

- Provides funding to the North of Iraq and has tax deductible status. Offers protection from physical harm; provision of relief packages (shelter, food, clothing, hygiene products, etc.) and to retain a space for Assyrians in Iraq

"Since the retreat of ISIS, efforts of the diaspora has gone to the rebuilding of towns"

Seminar participant

- This is done through: Relief projects; establishment of Assyrian education systems in Iraq, etc.
- Large population of Assyrian diasporas in Western Sydney
- 2014 - to now: Emergency relief response following the invasion of Mosul by ISIS
- Since 2011, ASS has represented the needs of Assyrians in Iraq at the UN each year
- Being able to adapt to the situation at the time is crucial to survival in times of crisis

"We know exactly what they need, because we have people on the ground. That's how we know what to respond to"

Seminar participant

- Unification of organisations made supporting the people on the ground, successful - this was made possible by the ASS members in Iraq - link between diaspora people and communities still in home country
- Positive, open dialogue between ASS and government organisations like DFAT etc. is needed for real impact. Also need to foster dialogue with local, state and federal government in Iraq: "It's a matter of having positive government dialog, that can advance the conditions of our people, whether in Iraq, or in other countries that they settled. "



Ms Nora Michael
(Assyrian Aid Society)

Ms Apajok Biar, South Sudan Voices of Salvation

- SSVS Direct response to Civil War breakout in 2013 and famine in 2017: “All in the diaspora was hoping that this would stop in a week. It was all over the news, we asked what can we do”
- Communication between diasporas and communities in home country meant that they saw the need ““The aid organisations were responding, but they respond to a particular area. And our family members were in other areas”
- Aid responses are targeted to a particular area – these don’t always reach everyone that needs assistance and want to train community to support themselves – move away from dependency model of aid and also focus on advocacy

“We did fundraising events across all of Australia. These fundraising events provided a platform to inform people about what was happening in South Sudan”

Seminar participant

- Agriculture funding project to provide communities with capacity and strength to move beyond the SSVS support = sustainable
 - ▶ instability meant this fell through
- Refugee camps are also unstable > scarce food and lack of education opportunities for youth
- Freedom Pads – provision of sanitary items



**Twitter quote by Melissa Phillips
@migratorymel**

Responding to the outbreak of civil war in #SouthSudan in hard to reach areas by #SouthSudanVoicesofSalvation - youth creating awareness #diaspora responses in times of #disaster #DLN2018

- Disaster situations are a barrier to accessing education – scholarships via fundraising events
- Soccer equipment sent to South Sudan via donation –gives them a sense of joy and childhood to remember as they grow up.
- Living in a diaspora you can advocate but you feel as sense of guilt since you are not actually there.
- Diaspora advocacy is a strong catalyst for change and support
- Xenophobia is created from the ‘unknown’, e.g. false representation
 - ▶ I.e. The perception that ALL South Sudanese youth must be part of APEX youth gang
- Social media as a connector between diasporas groups (e.g. Snap Chat, Facebook)

“Being a young woman, pushing for change for peace, from a diaspora. When people learn that you are campaigning, and here that you are talking about them, they get hope”

Seminar participant



Apajok Biar
(South Sudan Voices of Salvation)

Ms Shakufa Tahiri, *Refugee Council of Australia*

- Hazara Enlightenment Movement: triggered by a Hazara group identity
- Active targeted violence towards Hazara communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan
- Anti-discrimination protest for a more just system, 2016: 200 people killed – many Hazara academics, huge loss for the community
- 380,000 Twitter posts #enlightenment movement as a movement for equality that aims to have global influence
- Education scholarships for students in Pakistan and Afghanistan – whose families have been lost; or live on the streets
- Diaspora support can be strengthened through support from foreign affair departments

“It’s not just the remittances support, but the social support. Going forward, I think there are many ways in which the diaspora can get support. Getting support with government organisations”

Seminar participant

 **Twitter quote by Nichole Georgeou
@NicholeGeorgeou**

Shukufa Tahiri from Refugee Council speaks about the important role of diaspora communities in providing social and political support for change in the homeland.
[@DiasporaAction](#) [@westsydunews](#)
[@migratorymel](#) #diaspora



**L-R
Hayat Akbari, Shukufa Tahiri**

PART 3: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

In small groups, participants discussed the following issues:

1. Thinking about the presentations we heard earlier, or drawing on your own experiences, what are the barriers or challenges to effective diasporas responses in times of disaster/crisis?
2. What does or could help (enable) diaspora responses in times of disaster/crisis?
3. How can there be better collaboration and coordination between diaspora communities' and other international humanitarian organisations responding during a disaster/crisis (e.g. with the UN, big NGOs and governments)?

Some of the issues that were raised included:

What is a crisis?

- A negative perception of the community in Australia
- A group being generalised, e.g. South Sudanese Youth Gang
- Discrimination against a community – this changes as time goes on, and moves to a new community

How does a diaspora define 'effective responses':

- Depends what the response is to
- Famine decreased from urgent to less-urgent
- Role of diaspora community in Australia: relieving challenges that communities are facing back home
- Diaspora community bands together
 - ▶ There is a collective sense of responsibility, united by a purpose & social media plays a role
- How do you determine where to funnel your resources?
 - ▶ Diaspora networks can be better placed to respond to certain events than government organisations
- Each part of organisations is responding to a different need - the informal coordination and acknowledgement of responses
- There may be jealousy among community leaders who are gatekeepers

- Do diasporas define what success looks like? Do you develop a mission or plan?

Diaspora communities' opinions on cash donations?

- Cash is given to people who are trusted, and is then distributed
- DFAT is currently working with banks to reduce fees on remittances in crises
- Diasporas document where money is spent through photos, videos, reports of where funds have been spent in home communities
- Social capital – people on the ground that are trusted in that they know where money needs to be spent. Corruption can be minimised but not completely eradicated
- Limited stakeholder engagement in a crisis situation – they are too busy. It is not practical
- When multiple people in a community are saying similar things, you get a clearer picture of what is happening on the ground

Some national governments have diaspora policies, e.g. Ethiopia, Kenya

- Would it be useful to have diaspora policies that recognise diasporas as a stakeholder? Is it going to add more red tape?
- Where are government funds going?
 - ▶ Diasporas are doing things that governments cannot do
 - ▶ They need to find a way to communicate at the same level, e.g. common, universal language, or training...
- In disasters, there is a formal response and an informal response.
 - ▶ Do we need to bring these responses together, or leave them be?
 - ▶ Every organisation has a different response
 - ▶ Are large organisations unaware of the small gaps in their operations that could have massive impact on the ground?

PART 3: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



Twitter quote by Diaspora Action Australia @DiasporaAction

How do we balance host-country expectations with the country of origin? Crisis response lacks a proactive community approach to disaster #diaspora #DLN2018

Large agencies are working at macro, not micro, level. Increased localisation could assist:

- ▶ What does this look like, though? For DFAT in the Pacific Islands = Hiring local people from IDPs to deliver aid to their communities.
- Diasporas as brokers:
 - ▶ Where is the platform where this information can be exchanged, at lower levels? Mapping of diaspora action = there is absolutely nothing like this, which leads to overlap, and areas being missed
- A tiered approach to collaboration and coordination:
 - ▶ Layers at the table don't necessarily know what's happening in diaspora communities
 - ▶ A lack of relationships at the lower level, so a full picture of understanding can be formed
 - ▶ Noted that United Nations Volunteers (UNV) are collaborating with diasporas.

- Advocacy around Foreign Policy White paper. The minister wants to see how we are engaging. It is strategic and 'look at your focus and how your community fits into that. That's strategic.' It's a two-way form of communication. If you are doing good work, politicians will recognise that. Finding the right person, using your local member in the right way, to get what you need.

'Wish List':

- DFAT (and other large, government organisations) providing 'Guidance Packs' such as reporting templates, standard operating procedures, etc.
- Working groups that diasporas are a part of. In the UN, there is mapping for every sector of work that are currently missing diaspora organisations
- Recognition of the capacity and skills that diasporas bring to different responses



Twitter quote by Nichole Georgeou @NicholeGeorgeou

Robust discussion at yesterday's #DLN2018 #HADRI seminar on the role of diaspora in times of crisis. @westsydunews @migratorymel @andre_mrenzaho

Diaspora Action Australia @DiasporaAction

Some of the benefits of migration to host countries include: workforce diversification; small business development; increased consumption of local goods; cultural growth; and more. #DLN2018

Dr Nichole Georgeou, HADRI Director Western Sydney University

- This event has highlighted a number of ways in which HADRI can extend its research interests. There is clearly a research gap around Diasporas and responses to emergencies. I would like for HADRI research to engage more fully with these themes as they represent large and complex problems that need exploration and solutions.
- Thank you to all participants for their time and participation, as well as to the organisers.

POLICY BRIEF

Diaspora Responses in Times of Disaster and Other Crises

During times of disaster – both natural and human induced– and at other moments of crisis, diaspora communities play supportive roles in multiple ways to assist their co-nationals in countries of origin and neighbouring countries. While the most well recognised diaspora contribution has been remittances, there is also a component of social remittances that includes non-food items (NFIs) and social support. This policy brief compiles the outcomes of the Diaspora Learning Network seminar convened on Saturday 7th April in Sydney at Western Sydney University to explore the different dimensions of diaspora engagement during times of disaster and other crises and the unique ways in which diaspora responses can help to alleviate needs. This Policy Brief summarises the key policy implications from the seminar.

What are the Barriers or Challenges to Effective Diasporas Responses in Times of Disaster/Crisis?

- **A number of challenges included miscommunication at many levels (e.g. between younger and older members of the community, different expectations about capacity of diaspora to help etc) volunteer capacity and burnout, language barriers, time differences and logistics as well as differing inter-generational capacities and working with community gate-keepers in countries of origin.**
- **Diasporas reported parallel action and/or working in isolation when not involved in existing structures which means they can miss out on gaining access to the right information. They sought representation, improved communications and government support at host and origin level.**
- **Bureaucratic expectations across countries impeded effective responses including funding, restrictions on money transfers, physical security and issues when sending humanitarian supplies.**
- **At a structural level, there may be a lack of community unity, in countries of origin, host and neighbouring countries which can be linked to trauma. Some communities require assistance with planning, prioritising issues and stakeholder engagement.**
- **There is no platform for mapping diaspora action.**

Suggested policy responses:

- Training be provided to diasporas on communication and reporting, for instance to donors
- Diaspora organisations be encouraged to register locally, for example with UNOCHA and NGO Forums, so they can be part of existing coordination structures
- That a platform for diaspora action be established that can thoroughly map diaspora efforts

What does or could help enable diaspora responses in times of disaster/crisis?

Diasporas discussed the need for:

- **Enhanced coordination, both with other diasporas and NGOs, and other actors working in the same locations as well as with relevant governments and government departments.**
- **Representation in origin countries, registration in host countries, and mechanisms for sharing good practices.**
- **Access to information is an ongoing need that would enhance the links diasporas have with local institutions and other networks.**
- **Infrastructure support and training in the areas of social media, reporting, policies etc.**

How can There be Better Collaboration and Coordination Between Diaspora Communities and Other International Humanitarian Organisations During Disaster?

A number of policy recommendations were made at the seminar:

1. **Training should be provided to help diasporas especially with reporting and other skills gaps as identified by diasporas themselves. This could also be in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and templates or 'guidance packs'.**
2. **A diaspora platform needs to be resourced and initiated as an urgent priority in order to map diasporas, their skills, and liaise with diasporas in times of disasters and other crises; advocate at government and Ministerial levels for the needs of diasporas as well as be a conduit for public outreach. This platform- which could be part of Diaspora Action Australia - requires adequate funding and staffing to be sustainable and ongoing.**
3. **There is clearly a need to expand diaspora networks across Australia, reaching new communities and those from refugee and other migrant backgrounds such as Pacific Islander communities. A skills mapping/matching exercise would be able to calculate the size and relative strength of specific diaspora communities.**
4. **The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper presents a unique opportunity for diasporas to play a more active role in Australia's Foreign Policy. This could be achieved through the development of an implementation roadmap identified in the Foreign Policy White paper and Ministerial-level advocacy.**
5. **Government assistance and support at host and origin level is critical to the success of diaspora action in times of crisis and other disasters. In particular:**
 - a. **Australian Embassies and High Commissions can play an important role in offering advice to diasporas, encouraging collaboration and providing funding where appropriate. This function can be more systematic and fostered by DFAT with oversight by peak bodies such as ACFID in order to raise awareness of the impact of the work of diasporas.**
 - b. **Diasporas may require recognition from host governments and their work could be strengthened if there are spaces for dialogue with governments and key institutions.**
 - c. **Australian government support is required to ensure that the work and contribution of diasporas is recognised in formal coordination channels, such as UN coordination mechanisms, workplans and funding conferences.**
6. **International NGOs and donors should consider providing micro-loans to diasporas as an adjunct to their funding. This could come with skills training on reporting, information campaigns and advocacy. To this end existing models of diaspora coordination such as the European based Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) should be explored.**

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