

## An AFSAAP Renaissance?

*David Lucas, Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute, The Australian National University*

In 2008 AFSAAP was 30 years old. Prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> AFSAAP conference held in Canberra early in the year, there was some informal discussion about whether or not AFSAAP needed to reinvent or re-position itself, or, indeed, whether it should continue to exist in its present form. This paper will provide a basis for the discussion of this theme,

### **Some Background**

A 'prognosis for African Studies in Australia' was made by Cherry Gertzel in the June, 1998, issue of the AFSAAP journal, which was then known as *The African Studies Review*. She wrote that in History 'unfortunately there are undoubtedly fewer Africanists actively engaged in teaching and fewer African based courses than there were in the 1970s.' Even more unfortunately these trends have continued since 1998, with more retirements. Furthermore, the rise of thematic courses (e.g. on famine, refugees or poverty) has reduced the need for African specialists.

Two years later, Gavin Kitchen (2000:21) wrote in the same journal that he had given up African Studies because he found it depressing. He also 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.' (Kitchen 2000:26).

Since then there have been two major developments that should modify his latter judgement, the first being the number of Australian companies, especially miners, operating in Africa. Secondly the number of Africans in Australia and New Zealand increased by around one-third between 2001 and 2006 (Lucas 2008a: Lucas 2008b) 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> African Studies Conferences.

A major blow to African Studies was the demise of the African Studies Centre at La Trobe which had served as the focal point for many years. To the best of my knowledge, there is now only one University staff member in Australia with 'Africa' in their title: that is Catherine Bevan-Jones, Project Officer, Africa, at Monash. Details of the *Proposal for the Establishment of the Monash Africa Research Institute (MARI)* can be found at:  
[www.adm.monash.edu.au/execserv/academic-board/-private/proposal-for-mari.pdf](http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/execserv/academic-board/-private/proposal-for-mari.pdf)

The back cover of *The Australasian Review of African Studies (ARAS)* shows that, 'The original intention was to provide a mechanism whereby Africanists could keep in touch with each other and with current Africanist activities in Australia. Membership of the Association was never conceived as narrowly academic and from its inception membership has included members of aid and NGO organizations, government departments, local African communities and others'

This intention is 30 years old. As a part of the informal discussions preceding the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference, Wendy Levy produced a draft on a possible future AFSAAP which stated

that AFSAAP should be ‘The peak body for comment on matters African’, and that its role should be:

- ‘To foster discussion, especially academic discussion on African matters’
- ‘Act as a contact point for those seeking information on the above, including media, government and non-government agencies, business and community’
- ‘Provide contacts or information for potential students’

### **Who is interested ?**

Firstly, let me say that I disagree with those who say that AFSAAP should focus on Africa, but I do wonder whether the interests of those who study Africa overlap with those who focus on Africans in Australia and New Zealand.

Who in Australia is interested in Africa and Africans, and how many are interested in AFSAAP? My guess is that the number of persons with a past acquaintance with Africa whose interest has lapsed vastly exceeds the number currently interested in Africa. We can think for example of diplomats whose careers include a single posting or someone with one research project in Africa. An example is brief stay in Africa in the career of distinguished development researcher Elspeth Young (Gertzel 2002:4)

Table 1 below identifies five main target groups for AFSSAP. Unfortunately there are several categories within these groups where AFSAAP’s contacts appear negligible, and these include African students in Australia and Australian mining companies operating in Africa.

#### Target Group A, Diplomats and Public Servants

AFSAAP does reasonably comparatively well in some of the seven categories in this group. However this largely depends on personal contacts which are difficult to maintain because of staff turnover. Recording the biographies of new Heads of Mission in *ARAS* is one way of retaining contact with the High Commissions. One success was that in 2007 a visiting group of African journalists sponsored by DFAT met up with AFSAAP members in Canberra and Perth.

A weakness appears to be contacts with people in power (category A4). AFSAAP has very little political clout, and may have regressed in the last ten years, as compared with the 1998 situation described by Gertzel (1998:9). Last month one of Bob McMullan’s offsiders told me that the Government’s approach to Africa was under review. Can AFSAAP be involved in this? Bob McMullan recently said to me that he would be delighted to talk to AFSAAP. The Sanctuary Refugee Foundation (see <http://www.sanctuaryrefugeefoundation.org/gallery.htm> ) was recently able to arrange a workshop for 20 of its members with Laurie Ferguson, Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship.

Furthermore, letters written to politician generally receive a reply. For example on 28 September, 2008, I sent an email to Bob McMullan asking about trip to Africa, asking whether details of his trip to Africa were in the public domain. I received a one and a half page reply written on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 (by which time some information was on the AusAID webpage).

**Table 1. AFSAAP's TARGET GROUPS**

<i>Target Group</i>	<i>Contacts?</i>
<b>A. Diplomats and Public Servants</b>	
1. African diplomats resident in Canberra	Depends on individuals
2. Non-resident African diplomats e.g. in Tokyo	.. .. ..
3. Australian diplomats in Africa	Monash has links with Pretoria
4. Politicians, top public servants	Minimal
5. Staff in the African sections of DFAT and AusAID	Yes
6 DIAC	DIAC has many parts
7. National Migration Statistics Unit, ABS	Yes
<b>B. Researchers</b>	
1. Australian University staff	Yes but not all are aware
2. Australian postgrads (including African Australians)	.. .. ..
3. Other research bodies such as Lowy	None
4. Top academic administrators	Only at Monash?
<b>C. Africans in Australia</b>	
1. African community groups	Some, but these are many
2. Service providers	.. .. ..
3. Support groups such as Sanctuary	Minimal
4. African students in Australia	Negligible
5. African Think Tank	Yes
6. Groups/retailers interested in African Art and Music	None?
<b>D. Australians in Africa</b>	
1. Australian companies operating in Africa	None?
2. Australian NGOs supporting African activities	Negligible
3. ACFID	Limited
<b>E. Other</b>	
1. African studies organizations and journals in other countries	Limited to India?
2. International and Commonwealth Organisations	Limited

### Target Group B, Researchers.

Within this Group, contacts seem very variable. UNE has an Africa Common Interest Group yet this contains only one AFSAAP member. At the same time as the 31<sup>st</sup> AFSAAP Conference, a separately organised and managed conference, 'Southern Worlds: South Africa and Australia Compared' will be held at Monash South Africa"

See

<http://www.southernworlds.com>>[www.southernworlds.com](http://www.southernworlds.com)

How many Australian participants now at this South African meeting are AFSAAP members?

### Target Group C, Africans in Australia

This Group is very hard to monitor. For community organisations are so numerous, and changeable, that it would be impossible for AFSAAP to keep track of them all. In Melbourne alone, there are over 60 Somali clan-based organizations with deep divisions along clan lines, as shown by

<http://www.crdsonalia.org/crd%20AUST.shtm>

However AFSAAP does have links with the African Think Tank and could develop contacts with umbrella organisations such as the African –Australian Association in the ACT in Canberra

Target Group C also includes African undergraduates 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. In the 1970s there was an African Students Association but no similar organization appears to exist today.

### Target Group D, Australians in Africa

Once again there are many and varied organisations in this Group. In D1 there are over 300 Australian mining companies operating in Africa, including giants such as BHP Billiton. The non-mining sector includes Flight Centre, Iress, and Jim's Mowing.

For D2, NGOs, the extent of Australia's involvement is probably underestimated. According to a recent flier, Medecins Sans Frontieres provides 'emergency medical aid to the victims of wars, epidemics, famines and natural disasters. Among them are more than 100 Australian and New Zealand field workers, who are currently working in trouble spots including Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia'. Examples of organisations (and groups of individuals) with activities in Africa include: Australian Volunteers International, The Lutheran Church of Australia, Oaktree Foundation, Optometry Giving Sight, and Qantas staff. In 2008 Radford College in Canberra sent 13 Year 12 students to help in a Mozambican orphanage (Lo 2008).

A few NGO workers attended individual sessions of the Canberra conference, without charge. I cannot remember when a senior official of a major NGO (e.g. World Vision or Oxfam) addressed our conference.

### Target Group E

Other organizations interested in Africa include the Commonwealth Round Table in Australia that aims to promote the Commonwealth and Australia's role in it.

<http://www.cрта.net.au/NewsCtre/Otherannounce.htm>

and also human rights organisations such as Amnesty International Australia

A lecture at the ANU Zimbabwean Archbishop Ncube to Canberra in 2007 was attended by almost 200 people because of cooperation between AFSAAP, the ANU's Centre for International Justice and the Commonwealth Round Table.

### **Membership, the Executive, and the Constitution**

Membership renewal is a tricky matter for many associations. Subscriptions may be easier to collect at an event; in this instance, AFSAAP's annual Conference. For those who do not attend the event then reminders by both email and letter may be necessary.

The current Constitution can best be described as minimalist and should be revised to give more guidance, e.g. about procedures for the Election of the Executive. In recent years several members (and in some years a majority of the Executive) did not attend the AGM. In some cases it was unclear at the AGM whether they wished to be re-appointed or nominated for a particular position. At the same time members who do not attend are disenfranchised, and are not asked if they wish to nominate.

The Executive in 2007 had some members with more than one function (e.g. Secretary and Webmaster; Treasurer and Editor). A major problem is the unequal distribution of work and, to a lesser extent, the geographical distribution of the members, which could be mitigated by tele-conferencing. My view is that all Executive members should have a function and should provide a short report for each AGM whether they are able to attend or not.

AFSAAP Executive members can be expected to be out of email contact from time-to-time, for example, when on fieldwork. I think it would help if AFSAAP had an email address not linked to an individual, so that others could step in if the responsible member is absent.

The Executive should be charged with developing links with the various groups and individuals with some political clout, and with journalists interested in Africa. They should also advise the conference organisers about priority topics to be included in the conference. In my view these should always include

- The African economy (including poverty, mining and food security)
- Human resources (including health and education)

In the next three sections I discuss action that the new Executive could consider in respect of geographical coverage, conferences, research, an African Update, and libraries.

### **Where does Africa end?**

Should AFSAAP include North Africa within its purview?

An Africanist is a specialist or expert in African affairs and culture, and AFSAAP should make it clear that it does not focus exclusively on sub-Saharan Africa. There are several reasons for this:

- Sudan (which is classified with North Africa by the Australian Bureau of Statistics) is a major area of interest, as shown in the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference
- The meeting of African Heads of Mission in Canberra includes the representatives of North African countries
- There are 53 members of the African Union which includes North Africa and six of the island countries (Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros, and Seychelles. Excluded are Reunion, Mayotte and the Canary Islands. (I personally would add Diego Garcia whose inhabitants have been forcibly resettled in East Africa).
- Australian companies operate in sub-Saharan and North Africa
- There is only one Centre focussed on Africa in Australia, there are several Centres under the rubric of Arab, Islam or Middle East Studies

With reference to the first and last point, papers on peace in Sudan at the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference were given by Wendy Levy and by Justin Leach, both of the ANU's Centre of Arab and Islamic Studies.

### **The Conference**

The Constitution revolves around the annual conference so it remains a key activity, at which, in my opinion, Africans in Australia should receive equal billing when the conference themes are devised.

Given the downward trend in AFSAAP membership subscriptions, the conference should make a profit.

Unfortunately the notes for conference organisers which existed in the 1990s disappeared and a new version was only created in 2008. Given that the conference moves from University to University each year it is important that these notes are updated and improved annually.

Some Universities (UWA?) are prepared to give some financial support for our conference, others such as UNE will not. Generally AFSAAP receives no outside support for the running of its conferences. For the 2007/8 conference the Freilich Foundation supported the attendance of three Sudanese-Australian speakers.

According to a letter from the Secretary/Treasurer, in February, 1994, the Annual Conference Visitors from Africa fund was begun in 1991 and had a balance of \$700

in 1994. This fund has not been used for several years partly because AusAID funding is an alternative for selected countries. In some ways this is good because the fund could probably only manage a total of around four speakers. Conversely further donations may be discouraged because the fund is inactive.

For the 2007/8 conference I sought the approval of the Executive for the attendance of a speaker from Khartoum. In the end he was unable to come but it might make things easier if a conference organiser was permitted to spend up to say \$4,000 on a speaker from Africa without the prior approval of the Executive.

My other suggestion is that the interest generated from the fund should be used to fund one African Australian or New Zealander annually.

### **AFSAAP and Research**

At present there is no large-scale research project on Africa or on African Australians. Perhaps I am the only person to have put up a research proposal on behalf of AFSAAP, which I did in collaboration with several AFSAAP researchers. I did not succeed but one difficulty I faced was that AFSAAP is not listed as a Deductible Gift Recipient for taxation purposes which means that it is ineligible to apply to some funding agencies. The Executive needs to remedy this.

I think that the AFSAAP Executive, perhaps in conjunction with Monash, might consider putting up a research proposal on a theme such as “Australia’s involvement with Africa”.

### **An African Update?**

The new Executive could consider promoting a one-day African Update similar to the many Updates (e.g. the Papua New Guinea Update) at the ANU. However some of these Updates receive funding from the ANU or elsewhere.

I note that eight years ago Gavin Kitching (2000:260 recommended ‘a major high-profile Round Table’ on (say) ‘The Crisis in Africa’. By 2008, not all African countries are in crisis, and an Update could show how much has changed in Africa since 2000.

The blurb for the recent India Update begins, ‘If you still think India is Ambassador cars, steam trains and Sunil Gavaskar, you need to be update on India.’

[www.canberra.edu.au/faculties/comm-international/attachments/pdf/India Update Brochure new](http://www.canberra.edu.au/faculties/comm-international/attachments/pdf/India_Update_Brochure_new)

### **Libraries and Galleries**

This year, on behalf of Professor Jack Caldwell, I tried to donate part of his African book collection to the Borchardt Library, but never received a reply from the suggested contact person. According to Article 2 of its Constitution, AFSAAP’s role includes to ‘coordinate African Studies programs and the acquisition of African materials by Australian and Pacific libraries’.

Perhaps one member of the AFSAAP Executive should be responsible for links with libraries, art galleries and museums. Contact persons at these institutions, especially those who handle book donations, should be listed on the AFSAAP webpage.

AFSAAP should also keep the membership aware of the acquisition and holdings of African art by public galleries and museums. For example, the National Gallery of Australia has a display cabinet devoted to African items, including a Benin bronze and a Dogon door. The ANU has a collection of Ashanti gold weights and the Powerhouse Museum has African textiles in its store. I notice too that at this Conference there is a paper on African acquisitions at the South Australian Museum

### **Publications and Dissemination**

AFSAAP has four means of communication: two hard copy publications and two electronic;

**Table 2. AFSAAP's Means of Communication**

<b>Means</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>In charge</b>
<i>Directory of Africanists</i>	Mostly lists Africanists but also NGOs	Editors: Counsel and Pelling (2005)
<i>Australasian Review of African Studies (ARAS)</i>	Articles, bibliography, book reviews, research, and notes	Editor: Tanya Lyons
Webpage <a href="http://www.afsaap.org.au">www.afsaap.org.au</a>	AFSAAP details, experts, conferences, etc.	Webmaster: Graeme Counsel
Emails to members	Events, visits, contacts, books etc.	Secretary (Counsel/Doherty)

In making suggestions below I am conscious of the burdens on those in charge and am assuming that help may be at hand.

Since electronic means have become increasingly important in recent years, some rationalisation may be needed and those in charge should agree on their respective coverage. In particular the demarcation between the four means should be made clear to members and potential contributors,. For example some papers from the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference can be accessed on the Webpage, others can also be found in ARAS.

Emails are distributed to the membership on an ad hoc basis. Are all members aware that their messages can be forwarded? Do we need a blog or periodic online newsletter to supplement or replace the notices sent out to the membership?

#### *The Directory*

Here there is scope for expanding the section on NGOs (see above).



## ARAS

I personally was happy to see the rebuild of the Research Matters and Notes and News in ARAS. I wonder what information from the AGM might usefully be included in ARAS.

The journal already contains a Research Matters section. This might be expanded by contacting presenters at the annual Postgraduate Workshop.

Abstracts of research done by Australians could be listed, probably in ARAS, in which case the Editor would rely on researchers or their colleagues supplying the information. For example in Demography Tim Adair (2008) has written about men's condom use in Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Burkino Faso.

## ARAS Book Reviews

I think it important that they endeavour to cover (or at least list) all on-going research on Africa and all books on Africa published in Australian or by Australian authors regardless of whether review copies are received or not. The review section could be built up by including a wider range of publishers (Incidentally I did try to invite James Currey) to attend the 1998 AFSAAP conference: we should keep trying).

Examples of books by Australians not reviewed include:

*St Jude's* by Gemma Sisia (2007) Sydney; Macmillan The blurb refers to 'A girl from Gyra, a school in Africa and the patron saint of hopeless causes.'  
Valerie Browning's (2008) *Maalika* (Pan Macmillan)

## The Webpage

The Webpage could maintain a of list important hyperlinks for researchers. For example,

The Southern Africa Migration Project at Queen's University, Canada,  
<http://www.queensu.ca/samp>

Also

National Inquiry Services Centre (Grahamstown) which advertises its databases and offers "Free Databases of the Month"

[communications@nisc.co.za](mailto:communications@nisc.co.za)

The webpage could be seen as a site where organisations such as Medecins Sans Frontieres could advertise their national activities:

For example they had a "Refugee Camp in Your City" event in Brisbane Sydney, and Canberra in 2008.

<http://refugeecamp.msf.org.au>

This event will tour in Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth in 2009

Another would be One Just World which is defined as 'a series of national after-work forums focussing on global poverty and development topics..'

Businesses selling African products could be listed on the AFSAAP webpage provided they join AFSAAP as organisational members.  
An example would be Orient House in Sydney whose specialties include African artefacts,  
See [www.orienthouse.net.au](http://www.orienthouse.net.au)

Promotion of non-commercial items such as the Children of the Southern Sudan Calendar produced by the South Sudan Development Agency (SSUDA, [www.ssuda.org.au](http://www.ssuda.org.au)) should be free of charge.

If I remember correctly, one conclusion from Russell McDougall's paper at the last (30<sup>th</sup>) Conference was that it was difficult to run a course in Australia solely based on African Literature. However at the Conference dinner but it transpired that one option for the International Baccalaureate which is offered in Years 11 and 12 in three Canberra Colleges is a unit in African and Pacific Literature. Such syllabi might also be worthy of mention on the Webpage or in *ARAS*.

### **Conclusion**

The paper is a personal evaluation of AFSAAP's current activities, and makes suggestions for broadening its involvement in areas such as monitoring, advocacy, and the dissemination of information, and for linking up with other organizations, both locally and internationally.

2009 ought to be a challenging year for the Executive which needs to re-examine the Constitution, re-define the functions of its members, decide on its target groups, and consider its means of communication.

To end on a positive note from Wendy Levy who suggests, 'As for re-inventing AFSAAP, perhaps the process has already begun!'

## References

- Adair, Timothy, 2008. 'Men's condom use in higher-risk sex: trends in five sub-saharan African countries' *Journal of Population Research* 25(1):51-62.
- Counsel, Graeme and Wayne Pelling, 2005. *Directory of Africanists in Australasia and the Pacific*. Melbourne: AFSAAP
- Gertzel, Cherry, 1998. "African Studies in Australia.' *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, 20(1):4-11.
- Gertzel, Cherry, 2002. 'In Memoriam; Elspeth Anne Young.' *Australasian Review of African Studies* 24(2):4.
- Kitchen, Gavin, 2000. 'Why I gave up African Studies'. *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, 22(1):21-26.
- Lo, Paulette, 2008. 'Mozambique trip'. *Radford Report, Semester2*. Canberra: Radford College.
- Lucas, David, 2008a. 'Africans in the Australian Censuses'. *Australasian Review of African Studies* 29(1,2): 110-112.
- Lucas David, 2008b. 'Africans in New Zealand'. *Australasian Review of African Studies* 29(1,2): 113-118.