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Africa 'Pretty Underdone': 2017 Submissions to the DFAT White Paper and Senate Inquiry

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Introduction

Public discussion of Africa in Australia is hard to find. This paper is devoted to examining views on Africa as reflected in published submissions to the Federal Government. It focusses on two sets of 2017 submissions: to the Foreign Policy White Paper process and to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Countries of Africa. In 2015 Gai Brodtmann (Member for Canberra in the House of Representatives) represented the Opposition at the second Australia-Africa Dialogue held in Zambia. She concluded that the Dialogue highlighted the fact that, "apart from mining, the relationship between Australia and the nations of Africa is pretty underdone." Brodtmann's view reflected Recommendation 5.3 of the 1997 Report of Committee of Review of the Australian Overseas Aid Program: South Asia and Africa were of lower priority than Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands and East Asia (AusAID, 1997:14). In 1996 the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade had produced a 164 page report on Australia's Relations with Southern Africa following some 73 submissions, and promoting 42 recommendations. Some of these were not implemented. For example, no. 26 that "Australia reaffirms its commitment to the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for official development purposes". Another apparent non-starter, no 41, concerned the creation of a Centre for African Studies in Western Australia. A similar

recommendation for an African Studies Centre, location unspecified, in 2011 was also ignored.

A decade later in 2017 the Department of Foreign Affairs asked for public submissions for a White Paper which would “provide a roadmap for advancing and protecting Australia’s international interests and define how we engage with the world in the years ahead” and would “define our economic, security and foreign policy interests and examine global trends”. Suggested topics included which countries would be the most important to Australia over the next 10 years; what steps should be taken to maximize Australia’s trade and role in the global economy and how government could best work in this area with non-government players including business, universities, and NGOs. Over 9,200 submissions were received but they were overwhelmingly campaign submissions (submissions were treated as campaign submissions where “five or more submissions used similar Language to discuss the same issues”). Excluding the campaign submissions this left around 600 submissions which were published on the Foreign Policy White Paper website (*NB* - It is not possible to provide a direct link to individual submissions to this Parliamentary Inquiry. It is necessary to go to the inquiry webpage and open up the submissions list – See Commonwealth of Australia, 2017a).

The vast majority of the Campaign Submissions were from the Campaign for Australian Aid which argued for a number of humanitarian causes including more aid. The tiny remainder concerned Commonwealth freedom of movement; recognition of Macedonia and removal of aid funding for abortion. The majority of submissions were from private individuals including many academics and medical workers. There were also roughly as many submissions from peace organizations as from business groups. Using a basic word search, this paper puts these submissions into two broad categories: those which mentioned Africa and those which did not. It is revealed that around one-third of submissions contained the word ‘Africa’. However, almost all of these also contained the word ‘Asia’.

Many of the remaining two-thirds focused on the Asia-Pacific, often known as ‘our region’. Some submissions writers gave the impression that the White Paper was only to be about the Asia-Pacific Region, interestingly this was re-badged (and re-defined) in the eventual report as the Indo-Pacific. However, some organisations with strong African connections did not mention Africa in their submissions. Examples include: Amnesty International Australia which obviously has substantial interests in Africa; The Australian National University which received millions for training African students, but whose submission appears to have been written from

the perspective of the ANU College of Asian and Pacific Studies (since other regions of the world are not as well represented in their structure); The Overseas Development Institute which received \$773,000 from AusAID for research in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Apart from the ANU submission signed by the Vice-Chancellor, there was also a submission from the ANU's Development Policy Centre which, apart from general discussions on aid, included two papers on the Pacific relating to Australia's unique role in the region and promoting Pacific labour mobility. Submissions from other Australian universities either focused on higher education as an export industry or came from specialized areas promoting human rights or other humanitarian causes.

Some submission writers gave the impression that the White Paper was only about the Asia-Pacific region. Interestingly this was re-badged (and re-defined?) in the report as the Indo-Pacific. Although several submissions refer to 'our region' meaning the Asia-Pacific, the report itself uses the term Indo-Pacific defined as ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, and including India, North Asia and the United States.

In its White Paper submission the Australia Africa Chamber of Commerce "The Australia Africa Chamber of Commerce, the AACC states that it is a national organisation that is dedicated to facilitating trade with Africa, by providing the very best quality research, networking events and business matching services between Australia and Africa." Yet it did not make a submission to the Senate Inquiry on Trade (see below). It also puts emphasis on how Australia can benefit from the African diaspora. There were a number of submissions specifically from organizations representing multiple diaspora groups. The Diaspora Learning Network argued that Australia should reengage with Africa particularly Eastern and Southern Africa whilst the Australia-Zimbabwe group put the case for involving diaspora members more generally. Joel Negin from the University of Sydney's School of Public Health, notes the decline in Australian aid to Africa in his submission, but argues that such aid can only have limited impact. Instead he recommends a strategy based on trade and engagement.

The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength

Following on from these submissions, the first comprehensive review of Australia's international engagement for fourteen years as embodied in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper barely mentions Africa. There are just 9 mentions in total, of which only 4 have any substantive content. Thus there

are two references to population growth; one to the risks associated with fragile states “in parts of the Middle East and Africa, affecting Australia’s security interests through terrorism and irregular migration” and one to the fact that Africa’s 54 countries are important to Australia’s achieving our objectives in the multilateral system (DFAT, 2017: 31, 33, 81). The longest reference is:

The Government is also working to expand and diversify commercial links with Africa. Africa’s population of 1.2 billion will double by 2050 and its growing urban middle class is creating new demands for goods and services. Africa is already a major overseas market for our mining services.

Overall the White Paper strongly gives the impression that submissions had minimal if any impact on the drafting of the White Paper which reflects the DFAT agenda to the point where one can wonder what effect a change of minister or even a change of government would have. Senator Linda Reynold’s belief that the White Paper would be “the perfect place to start addressing a renewed relationship with countries on the African continent” through economic diplomacy was not to be proved prescient (Parliament of Australia, 2017).

As confirmed by Prime Minister Turnbull, in a joint media release with the Foreign Affairs Minister, and the Minister for Trade, the fundamental objectives of the White paper are to:

- Work to keep our Indo-Pacific region secure, open and prosperous
- Maximize opportunities for Australian businesses and workers by fighting protectionism.....
- Ensure Australians remain safe, secure and free in the face of threats like terrorism;
- Promote a world with fair rules and strong cooperation to ensure the rights of all states are respected; and
- Increased support for a more stable and prosperous Pacific” (Foreign Minister, 2017b).

In examining just how these objectives are to be achieved, ‘stepping up’ to the Pacific, including a new Australian Pacific Security College looms large as does work with ASEAN and a new strategic partnership with Vietnam. There is an entire chapter devoted to ‘A shared agenda for security and prosperity’ which covers ‘An enduring partnership with Papua New

Guinea'; 'Stepping up our engagement in the Pacific'; 'Bilateral and regional partnerships in the Pacific' and 'Supporting Timor Leste' (DFAT, 2017: Chapter 7). Thus, despite the claim that "Australia is a regional power with global interests", Timor Leste merits more attention than the whole African continent.

The one initiative with likely relevance to Africa is "a new civilian deployment program, 'Australia Assists', which will deploy over 100 humanitarian specialists each year to countries and communities affected by disasters."

Nigeria specifically gets a brief mention in the multilateral context. "Australia will support reforms that give new and emerging powers a greater role in the international system. Some change to institutions and patterns of global cooperation is inevitable, necessary and appropriate to reflect the greater weight of countries such as China, Indonesia, India, Nigeria and Brazil."

Overall this analysis of the submissions, together with the White Paper itself, certainly demonstrates that the relationship between Australia and Africa is still 'pretty underdone'. The 82% cut in foreign aid to Africa in the most recent Federal Budget is a clear part of the same pattern. (One unexpected exception, which had something distinctive to say about Africa was the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network which referred to the historical failure to impose meaningful economic sanctions on Apartheid South Africa).

The Senate Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Countries of Africa

The White Paper process understandably attracted considerable public attention. This Senate Inquiry almost flew under the radar and several of the Canberra-based submission writers confirmed that they had only heard of the Inquiry from other submission writers. The inquiry had Terms of Reference which required particular reference to existing trade and investment relationships; emerging and possible future trends; opportunities to expand and current barriers and impediments to trade and investment; the role of government in identifying opportunities and assisting Australian companies to access existing and new markets. All of these areas really raised the question as to why the many companies which have been highly successful to date should need assistance from Australian government agencies which know less about Africa than they do. Even in the case of newcomers to the continent, they might well be better off asking companies already ensconced

there for advice. Indeed, two of the submissions to the Inquiry (2017) from Concerotel, and Windlab Ltd, appeared to be from companies which needed specialized professional advice on matters such as double taxation rather than the attention of a Senate Inquiry.

Two out of the eight Terms of References referred to the roles of Australian based companies (1) in sustainable development outcomes, and lessons that can be applied to other developing nations and (2) in promoting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. Both of these areas would be of considerable interest to development practitioners but there appear to be very few submissions from people with appropriate expertise, possibly because they had not heard of the Inquiry.

The Minister

At the Africa Down Under Indaba in Perth in 2017 Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said: “many Australian resource projects in Africa are outposts of good government. For example, the US \$1 billion contribution of Base Titanium mine to Kenya’s economy”. (Foreign Minister, 2017a) She went on to say: “The Australian Government encourages the people of Africa to see us as an open-cut mine for lessons learned, for skills, for innovation and, I would like to think, inspiration”.

In 2015 Minister Bishop inaugurated the DFAT Advisory Group on Australia-Africa Relations (AGAAR). The Group’s Chair is Dr Casta Tungaraza, the President of the African Women’s Council of Australia. Peter Coleman CEO of Woodside Energy, who spreads his geographic interests widely as he is also a member of the Australia Japan Business Co-operation Council and the Australia India CEO Forum is another member. Besides representatives of DFAT and Austrade, members also include Denis Cauchi, Director of Diaspora Action Australia; Professor John Hearn, Chairman of the Australia Africa Universities Network; Bill Repard Proprietor Paydirt Media; Henry Olongo, former Zimbabwe Test Cricketer and representatives of a number of community organizations making up gender equity and a 5/7 black/white balance (DFATa, 2017).

In July 2017 the Group issued *A Strategy for Australia’s Engagement with Africa* (a document clearly drafted back in 2016). This recommended that the Government should prioritize activities that: create long term and sustainable relationships across the entire continent; realise significant mutual benefits; and focus on areas where Australia is recognised as having a specialized offering in the following areas of strategic focus: Expanding trade and investment ties; building a sustainable partnership on development;

strengthening security; cooperating on global issues; strengthening the position of women; and developing closer people-to-people ties (DFATb, 2017).

DFAT

It is symbolic that the joint DFAT AusTRADE submission has a cover with a map in which Australia looms large but Africa does not appear at all. The whole tone of the submission could best be described as mechanical and weary.

One reason why the DFAT AusTrade approach is both unenthusiastic and misleading is that their focus is on trade not investment. Australian companies have massive investments in Africa. But these investments are largely not to source materials to bring to Australia but to produce materials to be sold on world markets with the profits being repatriated to Australia. Thus, Australia has massive interests in Africa which will never be reflected in trade figures. In a reflection of twenty-first century global realities, many Australian miners in Australia are actually competing with Australian owned companies in Africa.

Business Submissions

There were 15 business and trade submissions to the Inquiry including one from DFAT and one from the Western Australian Minister for Mines and Petrol. Five were from mining companies and their associates and the remainder from other sectors (commerce, windfarms, mining). The fact that the Australia-Africa Minerals and Energy Group (i.e. AAMEG the peak body established in 2011) made a joint submission spared most mining companies from any need to make a separate submission and so rather destroyed the purpose of the Inquiry.

AAMEG

AAMEG's submission sets out the figures. There are currently more than 170 ASX-listed mining and other resource companies operating over 400 projects in some 35 African countries, 105 involving old mining. Australian listed companies control more than 90 mining operations in Africa with potential investments of up to \$40 billion. Nowhere else in the world do Australian mining firms have so much invested. As the AAMEG submission reported: "About one in twenty companies listed on the Australian Stock

Exchange has an investment in Africa”. Alongside “being the voice of industry on member-driven issues” AAMEG also supports “enabling the Australian Government to leverage off the (*sic*) Australia’s resources industry footprint in Africa to drive Australia’s economic diplomacy initiative” and build relationships with African Governments.

Business for Development

Business for Development, a ten year old NGO working across Africa, Asia and the Pacific. made the case for the miners:

In addition to contributing to African development at a macro level through GDP growth, tax revenue, export earnings, and employment, Australian extractive companies have the capacity to contribute to the sustainable development of the region by enriching local communities in project impact zones. Going beyond traditional community development investments that put poor communities on a pathway to overcome poverty, these companies can drive economic empowerment through focusing on initiatives that address the aspirations of the poor for jobs and higher incomes for the long term through creating non-mine dependent economies that will exist beyond the life of the asset. Specifically, by fostering the development of inclusive agribusiness opportunities, extractive companies supported by African country governments, DFAT, communities and civil society can work together to drive inclusive growth that reduces poverty.

Such development could also meet contractual obligations to host governments to deliver community outcomes through a shared value approach.

Their specific case relates to the Kwale Agribusiness initiative in Kenya led by Australian organisations Base Titanium, the Cotton On Group and BFD. This Kwale project is supported by DFAT’s Business Partnership Platform (BPP) and is supposed to drive increased livelihoods for 10,000 smallholder farming households. It was the only African project supported by Round 1 of the BPP Round 2 had no African projects. The Kwale Project also stands out as a genuine business linked project, other BPP projects involve Oxfam, FairTrade, the Asia Foundation and even the University of Sydney (DFAT, 2017).

The Kwale Project is supported by Base Titanium, a range of Kenyan agencies, the BPP and funding from German, Dutch and British aid partners DEG, FMO and DFID. It aims to be self-sustaining within five years. It has already raised 3,682 participating households incomes by 30-100%. DFAT provided \$313,000 and the private sector \$1,411,500. Overall BFD's submission to the Inquiry focuses on their development model and lays no particular stress on African conditions or needs.

Perth based Base Resources own submission understandably focuses on the Kwale Cotton Project and its links to their US \$310 million Mineral Sands Project whose construction finished in 2013 with exports beginning in 2014 and now representing 60% of Kenya's total mineral output. Base Resources has also built schools, clinics and boreholes for communities close to its mine. Alongside photographs of its good works, Base's submission even includes a map of improvements in the multidimensional welfare index in Kwale county from 2014 to 2015.

ABCSA

The submission by the Australian Business Chamber of Commerce Southern Africa founded in 2014 and based in Johannesburg represents the comments of their members and individuals with related interests. The group noted that "there was a generic business perception of Africa in Australia as being backward, unsafe, conflict and poverty ridden and requiring humanitarian aid". On the South African side there were visa problems in getting to Australia for trade or education and a lack of awareness of just how China-focused Australian businesses are. They felt that much greater use could be made of the South African diaspora already in Australia.

NGO Submissions

World Vision

World Vision's submission was the responsibility of Dane Moores, their Senior Economic Policy Advisor. World Vision (WV) were somewhat hamstrung by the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry with their focus on trade and investment. Thus World Vision's recommendations focused on Australia's 'aid for trade' strategy, arguing that this strategy should target regions with the greatest need (including Africa) and that the goal should be to ensure that 50-60% of aid for trade funding should be allocated to capacity building to improve the capacity of African countries "especially small-

holder farmers, producers and micro-entrepreneurs, to engage in local, national and international trade”. World Vision used to be considered a down-to-earth supporter of practical support to the very poorest, but now the reader of this submission is left wondering whether World Vision would have done better by its poorest clients to attack the ‘aid for trade’ strategy head on rather than trying to accommodate it. At least World Vision does come out in favour of restoring the cuts to Australia’s ODA to Africa to at least 11.9% of the total aid budget as well as raising the overall total.

ActionAid Australia is a global women’s rights based organization working to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication in 45 countries including many in Africa, yet their submission was a mere three pages with minimal specific references to Africa.

In strong contrast to World Vision’s trade focus, Results International chose to focus their three-page submission on the single issue of famine and the need for Australia to provide more humanitarian aid to African countries facing famine.

Academic Submissions

The motivations behind the seven academic submissions to the Inquiry would appear to be highly mixed and include the desire to showcase the work of the individual and their institution; a perceived need to point DFAT to the paths of righteousness; and a fear of growing Chinese influence in Africa.

One common feature was clearly to try and avoid any impression, possibly given by geographically challenged senior administrators, that no one in Australian academia cares about Africa.

Thus, Dr Edson Ziso, a post-doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Adelaide (and now Secretary of AFSAAP) made a brief submission based on his thesis on Chinese investment in Ethiopia. He stressed the sheer size of Chinese investment, noting that Chinese loans to Africa now exceed those made by the World Bank and that China is far more comfortable with the African pattern of a mixture of private sector/state investment than Australia is ever likely to be.

As Coordinator of the University of Western Australia’s Research Cluster, Dr David Mickler did his best to present the University’s modest contribution to African studies in a positive light. One problem faced by all universities is the difficulty of knowing who is working on Africa across disciplines. For example, it may be only as a result of an accidental encounter at the coffee shop if someone studying African politics is aware of colleagues across the campus spending their days examining African geology or

epidemiology. There is currently no Australian University which has a physical African Studies Centre as recommended by the 2011 JFADT Inquiry. Such a centre could be of significant assistance in dispelling Australian ignorance about Africa and as a focal point for queries.

One unusual academic submission was that by Dr Bergin and Ms Patel of the ANU which focusses on security issues which link Australia with Africa and especially with Kenya.

Negative Views

Whilst the DFAT view was simply lacking in enthusiasm, there were a scattering of submissions which took a negative view of Australian mining companies involvement in Africa (we do not know what the two confidential submissions said). From a media background, Jonathon Davidson drew the attention of the Senators to *Fatal Extraction: Australian Mining's Damaging Push into Africa*, a series prepared by the Investigative Consortium for Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) which stressed the 380 fatalities associated with Australian listed mining companies in Africa from 2004-2015. Depending on one's viewpoint this is sad, but unremarkable given the evidence of the uncaring nature of Australian miners. There is also the issue of allegations of Rio Tinto and others paying bribes in Guinea and elsewhere.

Margaret O'Callaghan, who has an extensive knowledge of the situation in Zambia, stresses the multiple difficulties of doing business in the mining sectors in Africa where the physical conditions, lack of infrastructure and the 'enemy within' (corruption of local politicians and officials) all provide sustained challenges. This is true, but certainly the larger mining companies are only too familiar with these issues. The questions that should be of concern to the Australian senate are two-fold: (1) are Australian companies engaging in corrupt practices and, if so, what should be done about it?; and (2) are local communities (especially their poorer members) and individual countries where mineral and other resources are located, benefiting from this wealth, and can Australia do anything to achieve the more equitable distribution of the benefits of resource exploitation? There are no easy answers to either of these queries and there is also a continuing asymmetry in terms of information. Companies such as BHP Billiton know far more about these issues than anyone in the Australian bureaucracy. Would DFAT funding an impartial study of the benefits and demerits of Australian mining investment in Africa be a beneficial move both for Africa and Australia? Would pursuing a multilateral route via the World Bank be more effective? The World Bank worked very hard to establish a Norwegian style sovereign

wealth fund for Chad, only to be ultimately defeated by the corruption of the Chadian government.

Dr Nikola Pijovic's submission argues that the government should address four negative aspects of Australia's neglectful relationship with Africa: (1) a lack of political agreement on government support for an interest in Africa; (2) an Australian diplomatic deficit in Africa; (3) a one-dimensional focus on the resources sector in the region and (4) high levels of ignorance about doing business in Africa.

ACIAR

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research is an independent statutory agency within the foreign affairs portfolio. It is often said that, at least in terms of agriculture, Australia has much in common with dryland Africa. ACIAR spends 15% of its appropriation on projects in 11 countries in eastern and southern Africa, working in areas such as improving maize crops and biosecurity and pest management. To match DFAT's trade focus, in Tanzania post-harvest losses in mangoes from fruit fly were reduced from 50% to less than 3% allowing for new exports to Saudi Arabia and Oman. Overall, the ACIAR submission appears somewhat contorted in trying to demonstrate how innovations which help African farmers also have commercial potential (as required by DFAT). The Chameleon Soil Water Sensor developed by ACIAR which helps small farmers to optimize fertilizer and water usage may have little financial return to offer but an unexpected but welcome outcome "has been reduced community conflict over water access".

Conclusion

It is not clear just how organisations and individuals find out about government inquiries which are seeking submissions from the public. The White Paper Inquiry did receive a reasonable amount of publicity including on the radio. In contrast, the Senate Inquiry was nearly invisible with just a few organizations receiving informal invitations to make a submission from the Committee or DFAT. This is in part how the idea that there is very little interest in Africa in Australia becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Very few members of the African diaspora groups resident in Australia would have any idea how to make a submission to a Parliamentary committee, even if they were to find out by chance that such submissions had been called for. Yet, there are many in the diaspora such as the Somalis who are running small

export import businesses. Equally, had the Kenyans in Australia known in advance that they would figure in the White Paper as the base for a major security threat to Australia they might have been able to present a more balanced picture.

The Australia-Africa Minerals and Energy group works hard to demonstrate to the Federal Government and the general public how the Australian resources industry positively impacts upon Africa. To date this campaign has been ineffective because the Government has very little interest in Africa even as a potential source of wealth . Declining human and financial resources provided to DFAT mean that only the highest priority issues are addressed and Africa is always behind Asia in the definition of priorities. However, the report of the Senate Inquiry, due in June 2018 may possibly bring better news.

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