

Afghan Australian Development Organisation Est. 2002
Education Training Livelihoods

**Submission to
Parliamentary Inquiry into
Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia
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Parliamentary Inquiry into

Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia

Submission from Afghan Australia Development Organisation (AADO)

Introduction

Why AADO makes this submission to the Inquiry

AADO makes this submission to the Federal Inquiry into Issues Facing Diaspora Communities in Australia to provide the Parliament with valuable insights it has gained through its experience over close to two decades. AADO would like to share its understanding of what should be done to both recognise and nurture the diaspora contribution to Australia's foreign relations and, in particular, to its international cooperation efforts. AADO would like to communicate the factors that have made its work possible and how this work complements the Government's national interests. AADO would also like to identify barriers commonly faced by diaspora-led NGOs that work in international development and propose strategies to improve the current situation. AADO endorses the submission from Diaspora Action Australia and its recommendations.

About AADO

AADO was established in 2002 under the leadership of Afghan-Australian Dr Nouria Salehi AM. In Afghanistan, AADO has successfully delivered education and training for 7,500 Afghans, particularly women and young people, to foster sustainable livelihoods and professional skills development. AADO's train-the-trainer program, Master Science Teacher Training, has been particularly successful in strengthening high school science teaching and improving university entry rates for Afghan teenagers. Our village programs are bringing the gift of education, and a pathway into livelihoods, to women who have missed out on schooling. Through its humanitarian work, AADO in Afghanistan has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

In Australia, AADO is a full member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and in Afghanistan, a member of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR).

The story of AADO has been captured by Sally Morrison, biographer of the Salehi family, in a short book titled: *A Future Worth Having: Nouria Salehi and AADO in Afghanistan* (AADO March 2019, a copy of which has been forwarded separately).

In celebrating its first ten years, AADO had achieved significant milestones in delivering Australian aid to people in Afghanistan. **Annex 1** provides a summary of the first ten years of AADO's work.

In September 2018, AADO was invited to showcase its work as a change-making organisation at the *Diasporas in Action* national conference. Our overview on the key factors that have enabled and sustained a voluntary, diaspora-led effort over nearly two decades is captured in the presentation, which is attached as **Annex 2**. In an interview by the conference organisers, AADO's President and Executive Director shared their reflections on the role and contribution of diasporas. This interview is shown in **Annex 3**.

AADO's Executive Director is a leading example in Australia of an extraordinary diaspora leader, who has contributed significantly both to Australia and her home country. Her contribution has been formally recognised in State and Commonwealth awards. Hers is a very broad and sustained

contribution to Australian civil society, far beyond the immediate concerns as a diaspora leader to support the settlement and full inclusion of the Afghan diaspora in Australia – with her simultaneous work in Afghanistan to bring the gift of education to Afghan women and young people.

Much of this submission focuses on the work of the Afghan Australian Development Organisation working in Afghanistan. At the time of setting up this new overseas aid NGO during 2001-2002, following the fall of the Taliban, Dr Nouria Salehi was also at the forefront of welcoming and housing large numbers of refugees who had fled Afghanistan and were released from immigration detention centres with only a Temporary Protection Visa. This barred them accessing Australia's Settlement Services. Alongside this onerous and practical voluntary work, Dr Salehi was active in advocacy, working closely with the Victorian state-wide advocacy group, Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS), providing testimony to inquiries, academics and the general public of the situation of boat people and their reasons for fleeing Afghanistan, making a compelling case for compassion and understanding.

Diaspora leaders are often active internationally and at home, in practical support for their community members in need, and in contributing to informed and practical solutions.

In AADO, Dr Salehi has brought together diverse groups of skilled and experienced volunteers, philanthropic funding partners and a broad group of supporters and donors who have stayed the course to sustain and energise this endeavour. AADO's work in Afghanistan sits alongside the efforts of other large international aid agencies and is fully compliant with the same ACFID Code of Conduct accountabilities.

Despite positive relationships between AADO and aid program leaders and multiple submissions, AADO has not received funding from the Australian government aid program, largely because there is no 'category' that our work fits into. As a mid-size, reputable, trusted diaspora-led organisation, with close to two decades of proven success in education and training in Afghanistan, this is something that AADO would like to see change, on behalf of all diaspora NGOs.

1. Main concerns, challenges and issues

This section details how Australian policies and systems affect AADO's ability to undertake and scale up successful aid programs in Afghanistan.

1.1 Value of greater recognition of and support for diaspora-led NGOs

For many years, the Australian Government has spoken about the need for greater visibility and acknowledgement of the substantial contribution of diaspora-led NGOs like AADO. It is most regrettable that little progress has been made on successive commitments to forge a place for diaspora-led organisations in delivering Australian aid.

The modus operandi of diaspora-led NGOs is not adequately understood.

As a diaspora-led NGO, AADO satisfies development principles, but often in different ways. We have a long history of compliance with contemporary standards in key areas of planning, program implementation, financial accountability and reporting, and in risk management.

In October 2016, AADO wrote to the Minister for International Development at the time, responding to her ACFID Conference speech about the Government's commitment to advance the place of diaspora groups in Australian aid. Our letter outlined the shared issues of diaspora-led NGOs in Australia using the example of AADO's experience and proposed a way forward. (See Annex: *AADO meeting request to Hon. Senator Concetta Fierravante-Wells*). At a subsequent

meeting with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in December 2016, AADO was advised that the only potential avenue for funding was ANCP (see Section 2.3).

Diaspora NGOs do not fit easily in current aid program systems.

AADO subsequently proposed a modest partnership with DFAT to establish and trial a new funding mechanism for Australian diaspora-led organisations. Together with other diaspora-led NGOs, AADO developed a well-researched, feasible and practical proposal (see Box 1 below). Consortium members are Diaspora Action Australia, and Bridging Lanka — another long-standing medium size diaspora-led NGO — and Oxfam Australia.

We believe the proposal has significant potential benefits for building the capacity of the broader development sector to engage with diaspora-led NGOs.

The proposal responded to repeated calls for action over recent years from international institutions, researchers, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), NGOs, and diaspora groups. (See the full proposal in **Annex 5: Diaspora Consortium Proposal.**)

The consortium developed details of the partnership, including its purpose, how it might operate, its scope and monitoring elements. While, informally, we understand that officials in DFAT were highly positive about the proposal, given its consistency with aid policy, no formal written response was received to the proposal, nor has the content of the proposal pilot been explored with DFAT.

Box 1: Proposal for a pilot mechanism on the role of diaspora-led NGOs in the Australian aid program

The Consortium, which has come together to propose a practical, innovative, modest and low-risk new Australian Government funding mechanism is convened by Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) with its proven track record of supporting diaspora groups across Australia, and brings together two large diaspora-led NGOs well known to DFAT – Afghan Australia Development Organisation (AADO) and Bridging Lanka – with Oxfam Australia bringing its technical support to the work of the Consortium in learning-oriented performance systems for developmental change.

The Consortium seeks to work with DFAT to design and pilot the mechanism as well as develop appropriate systems and contribute to learning about effective approaches. This approach allows for sharing expertise about effective funding and accountability strategies as well as joint benefits associated with diaspora-led engagement in development.

The features of the pilot are listed in Table 1 on Page 4.

Table 1. The features of the pilot

Overall objective of pilot	To increase the effectiveness of Australia’s diaspora contributions to sustainable development in Indo-Pacific countries.
Expected outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of how diaspora-led organisations can contribute to developmental change (testing of assumptions about their role); • Effective achievement of sustainable education, livelihoods and environmental outcomes in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, in line with national and Australian development priorities; • Shared knowledge of development issues in countries of interest to Australia; • Better understanding about how DFAT can best support diaspora-led organisations to achieve sustainable improvements in selected countries; • Lessons about the use of remote management approaches in countries where security concerns prevent Australian presence on- the-ground; • Strengthened understanding of strategies to maximize engagement with diaspora communities in Australia on aid and development issues. <p><i>Source: Moving Towards a Fuller Recognition of the Place of Diaspora-led Organisations in Delivering Australia’s Aid’ proposed by a Consortium comprising Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) Afghan Australia Development Organisation (AADO) Bridging Lanka with Oxfam Australia. May 2018</i></p>

AADO still believes this proposal merits a positive response. It could be easily updated, if there was interest from the Australian Government.

2.1 Alignment of Australian national interests in conflict-affected countries

Australia settles large numbers of refugees and migrants from countries that have experienced conflict or continue to experience conflict, classified internationally as fragile or conflict-affected states. By definition, it is in Australia’s national interests that peace prevails in these countries – for regional geo-political as well as humanitarian reasons – and thus it makes sense for Australian aid to contribute to improved governance, livelihoods and humanitarian outcomes. In short, Australia needs these countries to achieve greater peace and security, and the people of these countries need Australian aid.

Of note, DFAT often apply travel bans to countries that are the source of migrants and refugees in Australia. This makes it difficult for diaspora-led NGOs or any other organisation to work on aid programs. In reality, diaspora leaders are not easily dissuaded from fulfilling their deep commitment to development and humanitarian activities by travel bans. For example, AADO has a local team in Afghanistan, delivering programs (‘Afghan to Afghan’), so a travel ban does not prevent delivery of our programs.

AADO, like other diaspora-led NGOs, deploys Afghan staff to deliver its life-changing education and training in Afghanistan. A travel ban for visitors should not act as a disincentive to potential donors.

DFAT funding should not exclude diaspora-led NGOs continuing to work in countries with a current travel ban exists, if they have local staff, and are able to meet criteria that addresses issues of Australian staff travel, and accountability without travel.

DFAT itself can learn from diasporas how they operate with local staff and how they implement remote monitoring. As DFAT has withdrawn from direct funding for aid programs in Afghanistan, our programs are needed more than ever.

Unfortunately, as a direct consequence of the DFAT travel ban advice for Afghanistan, a well-matched philanthropic trust interested in supporting AADO's Science training work (which is backed by the Afghan Ministry of Education), decided not to proceed with significant funding.

While the Government is right to be concerned about risk and duty of care, a concern shared by diaspora-led NGOs, this should not prevent the provision of much-needed development assistance through diaspora-led channels. (See **Annex 6: ACFID Briefing Note ANGO's in Afghanistan**).

The more significant issue in DFAT's approach of excluding funding in post-conflict countries affected by travel bans is the risk of driving diaspora-led efforts to the edges of Australia's aid program, even underground. This increases risks and undermines the potential to share the benefits of partnerships between diaspora-led NGOs, other large-scale NGOs, UN agencies as well as future DFAT programs. Any proposed diaspora strategy must address these concerns and bring current diaspora-led development programs onto the mainstage.

2.2 Access to existing funding mechanisms

Beyond community level fundraising, the two key sources of funding for development NGOs are philanthropic organisations and DFAT. Fundraising alone is insufficient as a means to implement effective activities at scale.

AADO has worked tirelessly to secure new philanthropic grants and partnerships for its teacher training strategy, which enjoys strong support from the Afghan Ministry of Education. The competition for philanthropic grants is fierce and uncertain, with few organisations interested in international programs in conflict-affected countries. In terms of the official Australian aid program, over nearly 20 years of implementing programs in Afghanistan, AADO has not received DFAT funding beyond a small number of small grants from the Direct Action Program (DAP) for project materials from the Australian Embassy in Kabul.

AADO has sought partnerships, often on the advice of DFAT officials, with larger organisations that receive Australian aid for their work in Afghanistan. For example, DFAT is the largest single donor to The Asia Foundation (TAF) and over the past 5 years AADO has initiated multiple contacts to find ways of working on science teach training. In 2016, TAF advised AADO it was tendering for the delivery of a teacher training program modelled on AADO's model, and that AADO should submit a bid: the specifications mirrored AADO's approach. The contract was awarded to a group that had no previous experience in delivering science teacher training: we understand no teacher training was actually delivered.

Unlike TAF in Washington, AADO understands that decisions about funding for programs in Afghanistan have come from TAF office in Kabul and seemed not to have been influenced by DFAT. Had DFAT's Afghanistan Country Team had an organisational partnership with The Asia Foundation, just as DFAT has had with TAF for other countries, support may well have been forthcoming for AADO's programs. This arrangement would also have had the added benefit of preventing any potential bribery or corruption in decision-making.

When significant Australian Aid funding is distributed to organisations like The Asia Foundation in Kabul, DFAT should establish a partnership in shaping funding decisions as it has done in other countries with TAF.

Other Australian aid for Afghanistan has been provided in the form of grants through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). This important US-based international organisation uses a *modus operandi* which privileges large NGOs — customised locally-experienced organisations like AADO have little chance to participate. DFAT advised AADO to seek program funding through the GPE and that GPE DFAT program managers would be alerted to this advice. However, GPE did not respond, and it is clear that its formal processes and criteria lock out organisations like AADO.

On other occasions, DFAT has advised AADO to apply for regular NGO funding, such as through the Australia-NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). In order to be successfully accredited in this Program, AADO would have needed to employ a dedicated paid part-time staff member to undertake the work to become eligible for ANCP to access a maximum of \$150,000 in 2018. The AADO Board (all voluntary) concluded this was not an acceptable strategy. Our decision proved the right one because ANCP grants to Afghanistan were subsequently suspended due to DFAT security concerns.

The diaspora-led organisations cannot match the large capacity of NGOs such as World Vision, Save the Children and Oxfam in terms of personnel resources in Australia, but they still have an important and complementary role to play and should not be excluded.

In summary, diaspora-led organisations, despite their substantial expertise, on-ground knowledge, proven programs and significant potential to support Australia's national interests, do not fit into any current aid-funding category. Without a dedicated DFAT Diaspora NGO funding stream, most diaspora NGOs are locked out.

3. Support received over the last 5 years

3.1 Financial support through grants and sponsorship

AADO's longstanding development programs have been funded by a range of philanthropic trusts, complemented by donations from supporters and the Afghan-Australian diaspora. These are all underpinned by the significant in-kind contribution of a voluntary and hands-on committee of management, working groups and volunteers. This includes a voluntary Executive Team and an honorary Executive Director. These volunteers have worked tirelessly to secure a level of financial sustainability for AADO to be able to continue delivering its much sought-after and well-regarded education and training initiatives in Afghanistan.

Longstanding financial partnerships with the Cabrini Mission and Planet Wheeler Foundation are noteworthy (see below). Others include Portland House Foundation, D&K Foundation, and a significant bequest from the Estate of Bernadette Gleeson.

Support received does not reflect the significant efforts and countless proposals for funding support that have been unsuccessful.

The Executive team, often working with volunteers, has been exhaustive in its efforts — especially since 2016 — to secure a new significant funding partnership for AADO's awarded Science Teacher train-the-trainer program. This was in order to reduce reliance on the Wheeler Foundation which was a longstanding financial partner for this work over an extraordinary period of 12 years.

Despite Dr Salehi's tireless work in building strong support for the Master Science Teacher Program at the highest levels of Government and Government departments in Afghanistan, we have not yet secured a significant new funding partner for the program.

Our efforts have included sustained negotiations with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan, and prolonged negotiations with the office of Afghanistan's CEO, Mr Abdullah and his Teacher Preparedness Program of the USAID Promote Program. A formal approach to The Asia Foundation to co-fund with USAID was met with impossible conditions — that AADO itself should bring 40% of that budget and that AADO should not have as its target 50% women participants.

In Australia, our advocacy efforts with DFAT culminated in a well-regarded consortium proposal made directly to the International Development Minister to establish a bespoke funding stream for diaspora-led NGOs like AADO.

None of these efforts has come to fruition.

3.2 Support for AADO to build organisational capacity and capabilities (governance)

In November 2012, after 10 years of operation, AADO was endorsed by AusAID and the Australian Tax Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) as an overseas aid fund. (See *Annex 1: AADO Celebrates Ten Years*). This milestone was made possible through a capacity-building grant from Planet Wheeler Foundation that enabled the employment of a part time Co-ordinator. Achievement of DGR status meant AADO was able to attract tax-exempt donations.

AADO acknowledges the support of the International Society of Human Rights Australia (ISHRA) which had auspiced AADO's activities until 2012, under its tax-deductible umbrella through a long-standing partnership between our organisations. AADO also acknowledges the ongoing support provided by Australian Volunteers International (AVI) in the form of office space and meeting facilities.

4. Most supportive sources

As noted above, a range of philanthropic organisations have supported AADO. The longstanding partnership with Planet Wheeler Foundation has been the most supportive, and it remains notable because very rarely do we see philanthropic trusts take the long course. The nature of this partnership is summarised in a letter from AADO to the Planet Wheeler Foundation on the occasion of its 10th anniversary. (See **Annex 7: Letter to the Directors and founders of the Planet Wheeler Foundation**).

5. How would you improve diaspora support

As noted in Section 1 above and detailed in Annex 5, DAA and AADO developed a robust, feasible and practical proposal for a partnership between DFAT and diaspora-led NGOs in 2017. The key elements of this proposal remain valid and it could be easily updated if there is interest. A number of other suggestions are provided below:

5.1 Fund core costs of DAA

DFAT should fund the core costs of operating DAA, a small but critical umbrella organisation which supports, strengthens and represents diaspora-led organisations involved in international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. While DAA needs to continue to work in close partnership with ACFID and the larger NGOs, it needs to be separate and independent from them, and not reliant on their largesse for core funding. A level of financial support for the core staffing for the centre can be augmented by projects and consultancies.

Diaspora-led NGOs rely on DAA for practical and strategic support. For AADO, DAA is an essential sounding board for its work and issues, and its good counsel is frequently sought to add value on a range of policy and practical matters.

AADO believes DFAT should fund core costs of operating DAA. DDA's role is critical in formally building the capacity of diaspora leadership and organisations.

Furthermore, DAA plays an important role in capturing and documenting insights into the challenges and strengths of diaspora leadership and contribution, their cultural knowledge and their dynamic modus operandi in promoting peace, development and human rights in their countries of origin, which directly benefits Australia and the modern Australian community.

5.2 Research on the contribution of diaspora-led organisations should be undertaken

The substantial in-kind contribution of diaspora organisations should be quantified and recognised as part of Australia's aid effort. Diaspora leaders like Dr Salehi are frequently invited to advise, inform and share their knowledge, their networks and deep insights. They are regularly invited by Australian national and state governments to convene and consult with their communities for particular purposes. Salaried staff at these meetings benefit highly from the knowledge and connections shared by voluntary and well-regarded convenors and speakers such as Dr Salehi. Similarly, official and NGO aid organisations seek the expertise of leaders such as Dr Salehi as they develop their own strategies and plans, while she and others have willingly taken unpaid leave from their professional work to contribute.

Basic recognition of the deep and critical expertise that is found in diaspora-led organisations may include the provision of Honorariums.

However, an appropriate funding mechanism should be established to support the ongoing work of diaspora-led NGOs. This would be well-regarded by the diaspora communities more broadly, demonstrating recognition of the reality of the development issues that they know well in their countries of origin.

6. Critical missed opportunities

The absence of a practical strategy by the Australian Government to maximise the benefits of diaspora-led organisations to Australia's national and international interests is the noteworthy missed opportunity. A strategy that recognises and values the expertise of leaders from diaspora communities for the delivery of Australian programs internationally will help improve the credibility, relevance and success of these programs, since they would benefit from deep understanding of the context, the likelihood of success for various approaches, relationships and the potential for positive developmental change. With this readily accessible expertise, Australia's international reputation and its influence on change is likely to be enhanced significantly.

Diaspora-led NGOs such as AADO do much more than deliver development programs in post-conflict nations: they have the power to convene and broker relationships that the Australian Government needs and does not yet have.

Included are two examples from AADO's contribution, one in 2016 and a more recent one. (See **Annex 8: Roundtable with delegation of Afghan Parliament and Civil Society Leaders and with 60 key stakeholders to develop recommendations on how women's rights could be prioritised and protected during transition and post-2014, and in the peace process.** See also **Annex 9: Australia-Afghanistan Annual Dialogue with Afghan young women leaders**).

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and

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Annexes

Annex 1: AADO Celebrates Ten Years

Annex 2: AADO presentation to *Diasporas in Action* Conference Sept 2018 (ppx)

Annex 3: Dr Nouria Salehi and Sarina Greco interview on the role of Diasporas (DAA)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5INFRF785gk&fbclid=IwAR0HNELcBwaBDPd5ibuQCKGomFsFWU3kQIS8PHGVw3h-0xjki3XGd5T7uXM>

Annex 4: AADO meeting request to Hon. Senator Concetta Fierravante-Wells

Annex 5: Moving Towards a Fuller Recognition of the Place of Diaspora-led Organisations in Delivering Australia's Aid' proposed by a Consortium comprising Diaspora Action Australia (DAA) Afghan Australia Development Organisation (AADO) Bridging Lanka with Oxfam Australia. May 2018

Annex 6: ACFID Briefing Note ANGO's in Afghanistan

Annex 7: Letter to the Directors and founders of the Planet Wheeler Foundation on the occasion of its 10th anniversary

Annex 8: Roundtable with delegation of Afghan Parliament and Civil Society Leaders and with 60 key stakeholders to develop recommendations on how women's rights could be prioritised and protected during transition and post-2014, and how women's participation in the peace process could be assured <https://aado.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/AADO-Annual-Report-2013.pdf>

Annex 9: Australia-Afghanistan Dialogue with Afghan Women Leaders
<https://www.aado.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AADO-Annual-report-2019.pdf>

A copy of the book, 'A Future Worth Having: Nouria Salehi and AADO in Afghanistan' (AADO: March 2019) has been mailed separately.

