



AFRICAN LEADERSHIP, LEARNING AND ADVOCACY GROUP INC.

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**African cultural integration and harmony initiative**

**DIVERSE AUSTRALIA PROGRAM SMALL GRANTS  
PROJECT**

**Activity Report 2010**

## 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Over the last two decades there has been a proliferation of African associations in Victoria, numbering more than 25 as of March 2009. Unfortunately, African migrants often do not get along with each other, and there is intolerance within and across various African migrant associations, usually based tribal affiliation and geographic demarcation in countries of origin. Therefore, the aim for the African cultural integration and harmony initiative was to bring together African migrants from across the state, representatives from various African migrant associations, and service providers working with African migrants, to celebrate the richness of African culture. This was achieved through presentations of case studies various by African associations and representatives, African music performance and dance, and informal interactive cultural exchange. Case studies promoted cultural tolerance and harmony as well as highlighting practical steps for maximising connections between African associations whilst enabling participants to build contacts and point of reference.

## 2. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

**What were your activities?** Please comment briefly on each activity as contracted, including numbers of activities/events held.

### 2.1. Presentation of case studies

The community consultation was held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010 in Richmond Town Hall. Four key African advocates were invited to give a 15 minute presentation. The session key theme was: **“Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward Promoting Cultural Integration among African Migrants”** and speakers were asked to address the following questions:

- How do we prevent tribal and geographic demarcation-based intolerance within and across various African migrants in Australia?
- What are the factors that fuel such an ethnic divide?
- In order to promote tolerance, dignity and dialogue among African migrants -What should African migrants do? and What should the government do?; and
- African migrants have some great talents that are underutilized -what should be the best way to maximize this untapped potential?

The consultation began with a stimulating presentation by Mr. Ary Lyimo, Chairperson of the Eastern and Central African Communities of Victoria Inc (EACACOV). EACACOV is an African association funded by DIAC and its aim is to build a prosperous and vibrant African community fully integrated into the multicultural Australian society. EACACOV provides information advocacy and support for Africans in Victoria in a culturally sensitive manner. He described intolerance as arising from history, politics, poverty, inequality religion or human rights abuses. He identified that intolerance between and within African communities can arise amongst any groups including migrants, refugees, humanitarian entrants and students. Intolerance can arise from such things as frustration with lack of life skills in a new country, financial difficulties and not knowing how to set up a bank account, lack of English, legal problems, and not knowing how to negotiate or public transport. He concluded that Africans have talents, skills, opportunity and potential to make a difference in Australian society, but they just need support. He saluted the African Leadership, Learning and Advocacy Group for its effort in trying to bridge the cultural divide among African migrants



### **Mr. Ary Lyimo from EACACOV**

Our second speaker of the night was Another Pastor Peter Bondole from the Faith and Victory Church. He spoke passionately about promoting cultural integration through churches. He highlighted the values of the Christian church that Africans adhere to namely 1) love your neighbour as yourself; 2) mutual respect of one another; and 3) brothers dwelling together in harmony. His church works with people from over 14 African countries from many suburbs in Victoria. He integrates Africans of different backgrounds using strategies such as appointing them to different offices within the church. He encourages informal 'getting to know each other' sessions at community food nights and celebrates festivals and church holidays with church members. Another strategy Pastor Peter uses is to conduct the main service in English

which connects people from different countries. There is however room for cultural expression in the music, dress and dance. He encourages family connections by supporting pregnant women and their families and car pooling on a regular basis. He promotes activities for different age groups in the church for instance couples meetings. He noted that organisations such as churches giving qualified professionals from Africa a chance to practice their skills. They also provide work experience for students who are studying, one on one tutoring for students and developing pathways for people to go into training for instance in music, hairdressing and filming. Other specific activities he arranges are: learner driver mentoring by community members in smaller organisations like churches; community training in job interview skills; providing a 'safe space' for integration of ethnic minority groups; providing mentoring for new arrivals so that they can practice their English regularly; and working together with other community associations to support people. Pastor Bondole commended the work the African Leadership, Learning and Advocacy Group is doing and felt strongly that this is the kind of an organisation that needs to be supported to promote the cause of African migrants. He highlighted the skills and competencies that ALLAG members possess and the need to draw from such vast experience to help African migrants and their associations to flourish in Australia



### **Pastor Peter from the Faith and Victory Church**

Our third speaker of the night was Mr. Godefa G'her, a community representative from the Ethiopian community and project Officer, Australian Community Centre for Diabetes. Mr. G'her highlighted the need to use health as a starting point for mobilizing the African community. He highlighted the fact that type 2 diabetes is a serious problem among African migrants. He noted that by bringing African migrants together to confront the challenge posed by type 2 diabetes, not only allow African migrants to get together but it also facilitates partnership and group consensus on the way forward. This will provide a platform for future engagement regardless of country of origin. He

concluded by highlighting the lack of skills and knowledge to generate the needed and disseminate the needed health information and called on the African Leadership Learning and Advocacy Group to take on the challenges and integrate the health needs into its agenda.



### **Mr. Godefa Gher, Ethiopian Community Representative**

Our close keynote speaker was Mr. Eddie Micallef, Deputy Chair of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV). Mr. Micallef started by giving a special note of commendation to Dr Andre Renzaho and the African Leadership, Learning and Advocacy Group Inc (ALLAG) for its powerful stance against the misrepresentation of African communities by the media and by highlighting ALLAG's successful case against Channel 7, 9 and 10 to the Australian Communication and Media Authority. He noted that following the former Immigration minister's

comment that African migrants fail to integrate and closed the door on African migration, the mainstream media seized on this event to portray African migrants as gangs, identifying pacific islanders creating havoc in Noble Park their TV footage as African migrant. While the media vilified African migrants, no African migrant association was ready or capable of standing up for the African communities. The African Leadership, Learning and Advocacy Inc took the case to ACMA, and on 2 December ACMA ruled in ALLAG's favour. It found that Ten News at Five, National Nine News and Channel Seven TV News all breached the Commercial Television Code of Practice 2004 (the code) requirement that factual material must be presented accurately in news programming. They also found that their reporting had "...created an unfair presentation, overall of Sudanese people as being particularly prone to commit violence and crime". This ruling was regarding incidents concerning Sudanese refugees in Melbourne's south-east. In each case, the ACMA found that the licensee's verbal commentary, the footage broadcast and the omission of clarifying information contributed to viewers reasonably to infer they were being shown evidence of Sudanese gang criminal activity.



### **Eddie Micallef, Deputy Chair of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria**

Mr. Micallef also stresses the fact that the ECCV is well aware of the difficulties faced by smaller and newly-arrived migrant communities in trying to ensure a balanced, informed and sensitive representation of their members in all forms of media as well as highlighting the recent controversial Springvale Community Legal Service report released concerning accusations of harassment and discrimination shown against African Victorians by members of the state police. He suggested that for African migrants to unite for a common cause there needs to be a sense of self-identification on a personal and communal level. He further highlighted that for many migrants – and

refugees especially –arriving in Australia, a key part of Australia's appeal is the ethos of giving everyone a fair go. However he acknowledged that unfortunately "*the grand ideal of "a fair go for all" does not always translate so simply to reality*". He called on African migrants to embrace the principle of commonality in plurality, that is, *in spite of our myriad of differences and numerous idiosyncrasies as communities, and as individuals within communities, there is still much that we all have in common*. In short, we don't need to be identical to establish a bond. In terms of ways forward he noted that from the perspective of life in today's competitive environment, ECCV encourages migrant communities to turn potential rivals into partners; particularly in relation to projects requiring government funding. He further noted that governments have a responsibility to ensure fairer recognition for the achievements of all Victorians, whatever their circumstances,

background and beliefs as well as avoid public funding which invariably pits one African community group against another.

## 2.2. African music performance and dance

Throughout the evening, participants experienced the true African music and dance expression courtesy of the Angel Voices Choir from Shepparton. The group provided entertainment and the dance and music were all geared toward showcasing cultural harmony. The group is made up of 13 ethnic groups from Congo, who back home would never been able to talk to each other. Through music they have find a common cause and purpose



**Photo: Dancers and Band member, Angel Choir band playing at the consultation**



## 2.3. Informal interactive cultural exchange

The aims of this session was to connect participants and 1) To obtain the opinions of participants as to why there is intolerance; 2) To identify what the triggers are of such ethnic divides; 3) To obtain suggestions as to what African migrants should do to promote tolerance, dignity, and dialogue among African migrants; 4) To obtain suggestions on what the Government should do to promote tolerance, dignity, and dialogue among African migrants; 5) to describe the role that

ALLAG should play to achieve the intended outcomes; 6) to obtain suggestions as to how to maximize use of the talents of African migrants; and 6) to describe the role of ALLAG (communication, website) in promoting harmony and tolerance. Over the course of the event, participants wrote and discussed responses to the schedule of questions. The summary below represents pooled thematic responses

- There seems to be intolerance within and across various African migrant associations, usually based on tribal affiliations as well as geographic demarcations in countries of origin- *In your opinion why do you think this is happening?*

### **Responses:**

Respondents thought that the reason for intolerance across and within African migrant associations arose from people associating with people that they know or communities within which they are familiar but not other. In terms of culture, language social support. Participants thought that a lack of understanding of the risk continuing tribal division was a factor in the continuation of conflicts the implication of this is that if people were somehow made aware that this could happen and was detrimental then they may change their behaviors. Differences in migration proportions with an over representation of certain tribal groups was seen as a factor continuing to divide communities. If a certain group is highly represented then its culture will be dominant possibly bringing about resentment with other smaller communities.



Participants from the Ghanaian community of Victoria-discussing challenges and barriers to integration

- What are the factors that trigger such an ethnic divide?

Answers to this question included the difference in make up or demographic profile of the migrants African in terms of education, professional training, social structure and demographic characteristics. Ironically, religion was seen as a trigger for such division. Respondents thought that the reasons such divides occur is religious differences and regulations which govern behaviours and actions of followers. Lack of communication was a recurring reason for division within African communities. This may occur between grassroots individuals, between leaders and grassroots people, between men and women and between cultural groups and between old and

young. This leads to people thinking that others are benefiting at their expense, which may not be the case at all. Rather than constructive engagement for the great good of all Africans in their adopted country, participants highlighted constraints imposed by the new environment notably “competition for available resources”, which results in a failure to share, work with each other and co-operate.



Participants from Tanzania and Kenya contributing to the discussion on the way forward

- **In order to promote tolerance, dignity, and dialogue among African migrants -*Have you any suggestions as to what African migrants should do?***

Respondents made practical suggestions of things to do in order to promote tolerance dignity and dialogue such as reducing the *number* of organizations and participating in neutral activities such as soccer games and other sporting events that will promote friendship and networking. This would give the opportunity for all African communities to be represented, another need identified by one respondent. By reducing the number of different organizations it will be less confusing for everyone including Africans. Too many organizations may result in wasted efforts due to have overlapping goals (reinventing the wheel) or alternatively wasted efforts due to disparate goals. By coalescing organizations it will provide focus, energy and unity of purpose. This was reiterated by other respondents who said we need to:

”... establish a well founded core group of leaders to represent Africans on different levels...the African Leadership, Learning and Advocacy Group Inc is a good start”

(Female, 20 year old, social worker, African origin).

There was a strong plea to use the wisdom and experience of older generations. These were viewed as being invaluable and important for community cohesion and also for retaining ‘culture specific’ skills and local knowledge. Respondents suggested setting up ‘mentoring’ programs by the older, experienced community members to mentor and teach younger community values and wisdom. Tapping into the knowledge of elders was seen as crucial for maintaining ‘African’ cohesion across all boundaries of tribe, regions and place in their country of origin Africa.



**Photo** Dr Renzaho, executive director ALLAG engaging participants

- *Any suggestions on what the Government should do?*

There was a general feeling amongst respondents that government should be more active in supporting existing initiatives in Victoria. The set up cost in terms of time, direct financial costs and ongoing running costs for existing organizations are immense and if they are achieving good outcomes their continuation should be supported by the government. A suggestion that was well supported by respondents was the need to provide funding to ethnic (African) organization to train team leaders. The implication is that such leaders would then be able to support grassroots Africans. Some respondents thought that Government could improve communication between Africans by such activities as advertising into African programs. One respondent saw the government's role as:

“...promote positive images of African immigrants...”

(Female, 40 years plus, Public Service/Centrelink, Not of African origin)

Given the resources that the government has through the media and well as its political and social leverage this was viewed as a reasonable role.



**Photo** A mother and child at the consultation



**Photo** James Digby (ALLAG Chairman) and Anne Digby (ALLAG member)

- *What role should ALLAG play to achieve the intended outcomes?*

Respondents thought that ALLAG's role should be two fold firstly, to provide a training forum for African leaders of different organizations and secondly to train (African) youth. A forum is the vehicle for improved communication and strategic planning. Training and mentoring of youth is crucial for the future of ethnic relations in Victoria. Given that so much disenfranchisement occurs in African youth this is a crucial group to target for this reason as well. Respondents also saw ALLAGs role as being a vehicle to communicate to the government and communities i.e. a coordinating role and 'spokesperson' organization.

Respondents thought overwhelmingly that electronic communication, namely email and website updates on advocacy initiatives, was the best way to build on this initiative for bring African communities together. They strongly believed that ALLAG should be supported to reach this goal, a unique goal. However, participants also acknowledged other conventional means of communication would be appropriate namely update on advocacy and cultural integration initiatives through quarterly newsletters as well as a personal touch would be better such as personal visits by ALLAG members to community leaders or at community meetings. There was unanimity among respondents that ALLAG should promote African social enterprises on its website including cultural, musical, and storytelling events. Respondents want to see the ALLAG website being used to promote ‘awareness’ of African things in Victoria. It could for example list services for and by Africans in Victoria and be a resource for African information (legal services, migration specialists, health services, caterers).

Respondents thought that Forums addressing some key challenges of the migration experience e.g. intergenerational conflicts would be constructive and others thought once again that sporting activities (Soccer, Athletics) would be suitable. There was general agreement that ALLAG should host further celebrations of African communities and play a co-ordination role in bringing these communities together, i.e. provide the mechanism to bring Africans together, get communities talking and interacting

Participants at the consultation thought that ALLAG membership could be increased by “establishing an information sharing database” for use by all members. They thought that membership of various ethnic African organizations could be encouraged by targeting the leaders or the organization who will then tell their organization about ALLAG’s work. Other respondents agreed with this suggesting that African communities’ executive members need to be invited to participate in ALLAG executive board meeting if possible. Even if one of each organization’s executives was an ALLAG member then there would be better representation and this way there would be a sense of inclusion.



Photo: on the left, a representative from the Nigeria Community of Victoria

- **African migrants have some great talents that are underutilised. What should be the best way to maximise these untapped potentials?**

There was general recognition that migrants bring rich resources to their new country. In the case of African, these are across all dimensions including academic, management, entrepreneurial, musically, and from the government and food sectors. It was suggested that these resources can be brought to immediate use by formally recognizing these skills by academic and professional organizations, by: “Ethnic organizations to support members by offering work experience instead of always out-sourcing to consultants...” (Female, 20 year old, social worker, African origin). Other ways to utilizing these skills are to improve communication, networking with Africans (visiting) and better means of communication e.g. a magazine published monthly or quarterly.

### **3. How many people participated in the activities?**

85 people attended the event (70 African migrant representatives and 14 Australian and other ethnic communities affiliated with African communities)

### **4. What were the cultural backgrounds of the people involved in the activities?**

There were representatives from various African communities across Victoria with different background namely: Ghanaians, Tanzanians, Rwandese, Congolese, Ethiopians, Somalis, Kenyans, Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Burundian, and Australians and other ethnic communities affiliated with African communities here in Melbourne.

### **5. ISSUES ARISING**

As usual, Africans are never on-time. Although the events was planned to start at 3:30 PM, the majority of African migrant did not start arriving until 7:50. This is due to the fact that most of them work on weekends and for them a Saturday consultation is treated as a party; hence a party starts at 8 pm.

### **6. ANY FURTHER COMMENTS?**

We would like to acknowledge the financial support received from the Australian Government’s Diverse Australia Program Small Grants, which facilitated ALLAG to run a workshop aiming to bring African Communities’ leaders together and promoting tolerance amongst various African Communities operating in Victoria. ALLAG will continuously advocate for unity and harmony amongst African Associations.