



Submission No 29

**Review of Australia's Relationship with the  
Countries of Africa**

**Name:** Dr Tanya Lyons  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Political and International Studies

**Organisation:** Flinders University



**Dr. Tanya Lyons**

Department of International Relations,  
School of International Studies,  
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences,  
Flinders University

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 08 82013588

Mobile: 0414249842

Fax: 08 82015111

Tanya.lyons@flinders.edu.au

<http://socsci.flinders.edu.au/global/africa>

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Email to - [jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)

**RE: Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
“Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa”**

To the Committee Members,

I am writing this submission as an individual, and in my capacity as a ‘so-called expert’ on Africa. I am the current editor of the *Australasian Review of African Studies* (ARAS),<sup>1</sup> I have been an executive member of AFSAAP since 1995,<sup>2</sup> and I am a senior lecturer in the School International Studies at Flinders University,<sup>3</sup> and one of the few academics in Australia to teach dedicated topics on African studies to students in international relations.

The main issue I would like to raise with the committee concerns all of the terms of reference of this inquiry. That is because simply, there is a lack of capacity in Australian universities to train and develop experts in African issues to even comment upon these points, hence if the government is looking to increase, enhance, or develop its relations with African countries in terms of

- bilateral relations at the parliamentary and government levels;
- economic issues, including trade and investment;
- cultural, scientific and educational relations and exchanges;
- development assistance co-operation and capacity building;
- defence cooperation, regional security and strategic issues; and
- migration and human rights issues,

then it will be important to provide incentives and support for the development of African studies topics and programs at Australian universities, and indeed as I will suggest below, support the creation of an Australian-African Research Institute.

Research conducted in 2003 by Lyons and Dimock<sup>4</sup> (see appendix 1 “*The State of African Studies in Australia*”) demonstrates the lack of an Africa specific focus in topics available to tertiary students, and thus clearly shows that Australian universities are not able to provide indepth opportunities within tertiary education to study Africa – ie politics, society, economy, languages. For example, the 2003 research revealed that La Trobe University offered only 4 topics dedicated to Africa, Macquarie University offered 3, and Flinders University offered only 2 topics (Note - on average an undergraduate degree would consist of 20-24 topics). While there are a few more topics

inspiring  
achievement

that mention Africa, or use Africa as a case study within other themes, this does not amount to an in-depth approach to developing African area studies experts in Australia.

There is a significant number of postgraduates conducting research into Africa and African issues, and in particular to Africans in Australia and their settlement issues. There is no research to date that tracks this research or its outcomes, and anecdotally it would appear that many researchers are unaware of each other and their respective research and each continues to reinvent the research wheel – that is, many are researching the same issues without building upon previous studies, unless they have been connected to AFSAAP and have followed the research profile of various members of the association. The fact that this is all just anecdotal is because there is no incentive to do any of this basic research into research in African Studies. This is in part because of the lack of job prospects for specific African experts.

- There has not been an appointment of a dedicated African Expert to a university, since 1994 when Flinders University made a short term appointment (until 1998) of an African expert in the Department of Political and International Studies. Various academics with an African expertise may be gaining employment in Australian university's but usually to teach something else.
- The only dedicated African Research Institute which was based at La Trobe University was closed down in 2006 by the university.
- Monash University was rumoured to be establishing an African Research Institute in 2008, but nothing has eventuated yet (see <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/execserv/academic-board/-private/proposal-for-mari.pdf>)
- There are basically no jobs in Australian universities for African experts, so there is no incentive to become one, unless personally motivated for whatever reasons. There has been little call for African experts in government jobs. Keating's focus on Asia, and Howard's focus on America required no African expertise.

As I have argued previously,

“the Rudd government needs to put more investment into our own human resource capacity and skills to train and develop experts in African affairs through our university sector. We need African experts to provide information, content and analysis on the political and economic climate in Africa. There are only a few topics available on African politics in all Australian universities, and less than a handful of academics who could supervise postgraduate research on African security and political issues. China has already addressed this issue by promoting African studies”.<sup>5</sup> (*See Appendix 2 “Australia in Africa; the Human Dimension”*)

The African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) is an association of individuals interested in the study of Africa. AFSAAP does have a role to play in promoting African studies in Australia, but it is a relatively small association (compared to US, Canadian and British counterparts), it has no funding apart from membership subscriptions,<sup>6</sup> it is a not for profit association, and realistically only provides an opportunity for the members to keep in touch, and to meet at an annual conference. AFSAAP produces the bi-annual journal the Australasian review of African Studies, and AFSAAP maintains a directory of Africanists in Australasia (*see Appendix 3 last published in 2005, the 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Directory of Africanists in Australasia and the Pacific*) however, this directory is maintained by unpaid volunteers, and relies upon Africanists declaring their interests through AFSAAP. An online version of this directory is also maintained.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, AFSAAP relies upon the unpaid and voluntary initiatives of members for its purposes to function.

There is little more AFSAAP can do without more funding.<sup>8</sup>

I would therefore like to propose that an **Australian-African Research Institute** initiative needs to be established which would enhance the role and aims of AFSAAP, provide links and networking and information to government, business, university and community sectors. Such an initiative could be based in a university setting or in the private sector with links to the university sector. The focus should be on understanding Africa, not just to position Australia in terms of benefiting from a relationship with African countries vis-à-vis trade, and not just to understand Africans in Australia. The aim should indeed be to understand the dynamic relationships already established between individuals, community groups, non-governmental organisations and government agencies with Africa and Africans, and to research future potential relations with Africa in terms of the reference points of this current inquiry.

Thankyou for your consideration of my individual submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information on the above contact details.

**Dr. Tanya Lyons**  
**December 4<sup>th</sup> 2009.**

#### **APPENDICES ATTACHED**

Appendix 1 “The State of African Studies in Australia”

Appendix 2 “Australia in Africa: the Human Dimension”

Appendix 3 “6<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Directory of Africanists in Australasia and the Pacific”

#### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> The Australasian Review of African Studies is a bi-annual journal published by the African Studies Association of Australasia and The Pacific – see [www.afsaap.org.au](http://www.afsaap.org.au)

<sup>2</sup> Tanya Lyons has been on the AFSAAP Executive in the following roles - 1995-1999 Postgraduate Representative, 2000-2001 Secretary, 2001-2008 Treasurer, 2009 ARAS Editor.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Tanya Lyons is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of International Relations, and has been the Academic Coordinator of the Globalisation Program since 2005 and prior to this a topic convener in that program. Since 2003 Dr. Lyons has had the opportunity to deliver 2 topics on Africa within the School of Political and International Studies – INTR3064 Africa on a Global Stage, and INTR9041 African Politics: Global Issues. These are elective topics only in the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of International Studies.

<sup>4</sup> Tanya Lyons and Elizabeth Dimock, “The State of African Studies in Australia,” in Paul Zeleza (ed) *The Study of Africa Volume 2, Global and Transnational Engagements*, CODESRIA. 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Tanya Lyons (2009) “Australia in Africa: The Human Dimension”, expert opinion, in the *Australian Strategic Policy Institute online forum May 2009* see <http://www.aspi.org.au/research/spf.aspx?tid=8> and <http://www.aspi.org.au/>

<sup>6</sup> AFSAAP has approx 200 members, individuals and institutions – see [www.afsaap.org.au](http://www.afsaap.org.au)

<sup>7</sup> See Clickable Map of Africanist experts [www.afsaap.org.au](http://www.afsaap.org.au)

<sup>8</sup> AFSAAP has been attempting to re-organise its role and aims and many have asked it to become more of a pro-active reference point for government, business and the media to comment upon all things African. Its effectiveness will be demonstrated clearly if whether or not AFSAAP can actually make a contribution to this present inquiry, as an Association response. There is a lot of talk, but simply not enough people with the time and capacity to put the plans into action.