



SOUTH SUDANESE
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
IN VICTORIA INC

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Victoria Inc.

Senate Inquiry on Issues Facing Diaspora
Communities in Australia

SSCAV Submission

July 2020

The President
Mr Ring Mayar

**South Sudanese
Community Association
in Victoria Inc (SSCAV)**

A: 34 Devonshire Road,
Sunshine, VIC 3020

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Endorsement

SSCAV endorses Diaspora Action Australia Submission

Acknowledgements

SSCAV would like to acknowledge and thank the following South Sudanese sub-community organisation for contributing their time and expertise to inform this policy submission:

- Murle Community Association in Victoria Inc
- Jieng Community Association of Victoria Inc
- Luo Community Association of Victoria Inc
- South Sudanese Equatoria Association Inc
- Anywaa Community Association, Inc
- Australia Chollo Community Inc
- Fertit Community in Victoria Inc

SOUTH SUDANESE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION IN VICTORIA INC

ABN 94824971634| Incorporations Number A0090864C

About South Sudanese Community Association in Victoria Inc.

The South Sudanese Community Association in Victoria Inc is a Not-for-profit ethnic community association, established since 2015 with a membership of about 1,500 Australians from Jieng (Dinka), Nuer, Equatoria, Chollo, Murle, Luo, Anywaa and Fertit refugee backgrounds. It represents the voices of a further 3,000 South Sudanese Australians with their families living predominantly in the Western suburbs of Melbourne and some in the Eastern suburbs.

The association leadership consists of women; youth leaders and elders' council of SSCAV whom meet on community forums at our venue at 34 Devonshire Rd, Sunshine, Victoria at periodic time and date at convenience of South Sudanese community members. Every week, over 100 South Sudanese Australian community members converge in the South Sudanese Centre to be present for cultural activities with seniors, women, men and young people.

Executive Summary of Recommendations

SSCAV is pleased to present the following recommendations:

- Youth employment and entrepreneurship.
- Education and youth development.
- Human rights and responsibilities (particularly Justice and equity for youth and families).
- Community building capacity and engagement.
- Family violence early intervention and prevention.
- Wellbeing and healthy families.
- Arts, culture, history and media - communication.
- Women counseling service.
- Professional advice in different areas in collaboration with various stakeholders.
- Faith Centre.
- Reception Hall.
- Digital communication and engagement training and education platforms.

The purposes and objectives of the association are:

- To do all lawful things that are in the best interests of South Sudanese community members in Victoria based on its objectives and purposes,
- To promote welfare and advancement of its members, including the following:
 - A. Consider issues arising in situations pertaining to the association in areas of human endeavors,
 - B. Encourage social-economic programs,
 - C. To promote unity, friendship and cooperation among its members, other ethnic communities and host community,
 - D. To play an active role in assisting positive integration and re-establishment of South Sudanese in Australia,
 - E. Advocating and encouraging members to involve in self-employment activities,
 - F. Increase standards of living and heal trauma arising from war and political upheaval in South Sudan,
 - G. To provide and promote positive parenting and integration programs, involving recreation and social support services to its members,
 - H. To promote social, cultural, educational and other mutually beneficial exchanges between wider Australians and South Sudanese,
 - I. To provide support services to its members in Australia,
 - J. To raise money through subscriptions, public appeal, grants and other avenues that may be determined appropriate by its members,
 - K. To advocate for better services for its members at local and state government levels,
 - L. To promote and organise public forums, conferences and sporting activities for its members,
 - M. To provide government departments, local authorities, schools and other interested organisations and people with information about South Sudanese cultures and their flights or journeys through cultural awareness and storytelling program,
 - N. To purchase, lease, sell, acquire or dispose of any asset and any right or privileges which the society shall think necessary or expedient to help it achieve its objectives or promote the interest of association and its members.

The 1990's marked the first wave of Sudanese-born people to arrive in small numbers to Victoria. By early 2001, members of the Sudanese population to people resettled through the Australian Humanitarian program grew to almost 1000. The 2011 Victorian Community Profile Consensus estimated that the Sudanese-born population in Victoria had increased to 6,206 (Victorian State 2011), making them the most growing immigrants groups in Victoria. In July 2011, South Sudanese gained its independence from old Sudan. Now Sudanese-born people identify.

Majority of the community members have a strong sense of belonging to Victoria and Australia. Historically many South Sudanese Australians have experienced the catastrophe and heart-ache of ravages by fire and conflict in our homeland overseas. The members of SSCAV feel a genuine concern and compassion for the Australian families and individuals affected by the bushfires. SSCAV has made a generous donation to the bushfires appeal. SSCAV members were deeply distressed by the devastating bushfires throughout the country.

SSCAV members are keen to hear more from the Federal Government on the vision for rebuilding ethnic communities economically, particularly the involvement of the South Sudanese community in Victoria, as Australia is considered homeland for the South Sudanese Australians.

Members' priorities for the year 2020 are supporting South Sudanese Australian families through better cross-cultural parenting awareness and improving intergenerational relationships. SSCAV members are pleased to inform you that SSCAV has made considerable progress in youth empowerment and engagement, however there are still several challenges for South Sudanese Australians on other areas.

SSCAV has a deficit in culturally responsive approaches to mental health issues and young women are at risk in the community, and requires more support for those young people who have had high exposure to the criminal justice system; including post-sentencing support in rebuilding a better future.

A key issue in the SSCAV is young offenders awaiting deportation in Australian detention centers across the country; putting South Sudanese families in Australia in an extreme emotional and financial strain. SSCAV highlights that additional support on crime prevention programs is needed. SSCAV leaders have in-depth knowledge of these complex and sensitive issues. SSCAV is keen to propose several practical solution-based options, especially involving younger South Sudanese Australians:

- Establishing drugs and rehabilitation home for Australians
- Community reintegration program for youth on bail and community order

The purpose of this submission is to provide an overview of the Sudanese Australian community in Melbourne. And to describe social disruption factors that impact on ethnic-based victimisation.

This submission offers an opportunity to restart dialogue, and a critical thinking to hear from people who never had a voice to espouse their concerns. Lastly, this submission may provide information to deal effectively with issues faced by the South Sudanese community, particularly unavailability of a South Sudanese Centre, minimum youth support, reduction of homeless, unemployment, social isolation, mental health and despair.

SSCAV Submission:

The following are the concerns highlighted by the South Sudanese Community Association Victoria Inc (SSCAV) with its members:

- South Sudanese community members believe that it is necessary to integrate their voices in the community including Victoria and Australia,
- Mothers' require education on topics such as women and children's rights and responsibilities,
- Youth require training to improve their professional skills, enabling them to get closer in reaching their full potential and become examples and leaders within their community,
- SSCAV partnership programs have the capacity to build support for the South Sudanese community members with training including employment for youth and women.
- SSCAV can provide a sanctuary in mental health illness to service providers.

The following organisations have endorsed our submission:

- Federation Ethnic Communities Council of Australia
- Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

Key Concerns:

1. Since 2018, South Sudanese community has been awarded 12 million Australian dollars (Community Support Group) by the current government to assist South Sudanese community. However, the funds were diverted to service providers or sponsoring bodies which are out of touch with the community grassroots leadership and its members.

In the past, a service provider was awarded \$250,000 each year for four years to assist youth in job seeking and transitioning to a productive life. The youth project initiative had a minimum impact in the South Sudanese community due to lack of ethnic inclusiveness. Young people were set aside on decision making and project design. SSCAV is seeking adjust the current issue by developing appropriate programs and involving young people in a consultation plan.

The project was tailored to assist few individuals within the South Sudanese community and excluded other minorities, without considering the South Sudanese community grassroots. The program did not include a monitor and evaluation phase, and funds could have a higher impact by including elders, women and youth.

The community possesses financial deficiencies to mitigate different barriers and challenges, such as minimum employment opportunities, and racism which may lead to mental health problems, isolation, and violence. Besides, the community lack building capacity to assist seniors, to train youth to inter workforce, combating mental health, housing, and legal support; Children require a homework club, students mentoring programs, parenting program, and there is a deficiency in transitioning youth in detention centres to the community mainstream.

2. Personal safety – people are afraid to venture for a walk in the park or shopping malls fearing been attack physically or verbally. Children in school feel the brunt of racial abuse and bullying in schools by their schoolmates and some educators. SSCAV proposes to run a leadership program and a mentorship program to build children self-esteem.

Community wellbeing – has been severely impacted, the community feels vulnerable from politicians' attacks during election times or when crime related issues surface on the media. On 14 June 2019, South Sudanese was inaccurately portrayed by Australian Crime Statistics as community plagued by youth crime. The entire community is targeted or tarnished for the sake of few who committed the crime. The South Sudanese community experience some discrimination and exclusion from other ethnic communities, from the local government and the federal government.

SSCAV invites government departments to work with South Sudanese community in community building programs and advocacy.

Financial safety and security – Majority of South Sudanese have minimum savings or an investment property. Many people have been working as labourers for the last 15 years, some have acquired their properties, some did manage to send their children to universities, and other established small business. The vast number of community members, particularly youth and women, are impacted by 96% unemployment. Many university graduates feel discrimination in the workplace or while job searching. While only 42% of the South Sudanese members have a bachelor's degree or are trained in high educational programs. In 2016 a study from the University of Canberra found that unemployment rate in the South Sudanese community is 28.6%, five times the national unemployment rate of 5.7%. South Sudanese tend to work as security guards or may not find a job despite their high. The current media stereotyped of labelling youth as thugs and criminals has further impact on their chances to be considered for employment in the private and government institutions.

Lack of peace and security prevented many people in South Sudan to cultivate their lands; hence the majority of South Sudanese live in rural areas. South Sudanese relatives who reside in a big city such as capital city Juba do not have jobs to support themselves – they can only rely on their family members in Australia. Thus, overreliance on their Australian's family members to send money remittances have exacerbated financial impact on South Sudanese Australians.

3. To some extent, the SSCAV members have been neglected by state and federal governments' projects. For the last two years, the SSCAV leadership and community members such as youth, women and seniors have been working with the state and federal government. SSCAV would like to continue working in collaboration with federal government, invite and accept the invitation or even both SSCAV and federal government delegating an official to visit the community and hear their issues. The former SSCAV Chairperson did not receive any engagement from the federal government but was supported by the Victorian state government and received considerable capacity building.

Current barriers include the need for ongoing capacity building and governance support for the SSCAV executive and proposed initiatives. SSCAV would benefit from Board governance training and support in particular for up-and-coming young people and women.

At This Time, SSCAV members in Melbourne's west do not have a strong collaboration with the state government or any other government department. The SSCAV has attempted several times to forge partnerships with donors and project stakeholders but has been excluded from some government community consultations.

4. **The following issues are of serious concern and in need of vital support:**

- Lack of funding to combat bias in the media
- Racial injustice
- Prejudices
- Discrimination
- Youth Support
- Senior and disability support (Nursing homes)
- Job creation
- Educational support
- Mental Health support
- Youth Suicide prevention

SSCAV hopes that the State and Federal may assist the South Sudanese community in suicide prevention as best practices, including issues are related to mental health. Sadly, there have been almost 40 youth suicides in the past year in the South Sudanese community in Victoria alone.

The SSCAV consultation was supported by the SSCAV constitutional values and the Office Bearers have been elected via transparent democratic processes. The members of the SSCAV executive have a strong ethic regarding the law, accountability and ethics. Funding for festivals and events, and vital community-run programs and initiatives would have a tangible impact.

Recommendations:

State and federal government funding will have a positive impact if SSCAV community leadership for steering committee comprising of diverse gender and inclusive age group which reflect community diversity.

SSCAV appreciates government collaborative work with grassroots leadership at the community level, and in building truth and collaboration with the community and youth in general.

A much-needed South Sudanese Community Centre located in the western suburbs of Melbourne would alleviate much of the community crisis our members are experiencing by providing:

- Youth employment and entrepreneurship.
- Education and youth development.
- Human rights and responsibilities (particularly Justice and equity for youth and families).
- Community building capacity and engagement.
- Violence intervention and prevention.
- Health and healthy families.
- Arts, culture, history and media/communication.
- Women counselling service.
- Professional advice, and collaboration with various stakeholders.
- Faith Centre.
- Reception Hall.

- Digital communication, and engagement training and education platforms.

Conclusion:

SSCAV commends the Federal Government for requesting submissions on issues facing by diaspora communities in Australia. And we are pleased to have this opportunity and to be able to submit a community perspective on issues concerning the South Sudanese community in Victoria.

Community capacity building and pathways into sustainable employment are imperative for the health, wellbeing and social cohesion of South Sudanese Victorian, particularly new and emerging community such as South Sudanese community, which are critical enablers of a successful settlement experience and full participation in the Australian economy and society.

Although there are many challenges facing South Sudanese community, SSCAV have been able to cover in this submission, most significant issues highlighted by the SSCAV Committee Secretariat.

SSCAV express gratitude to the Federal Government for considering recommendations address in this paper. And SSCAV looks forward to being involved in further work in discussing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly the South Sudanese community in Victoria, and is interested to achieve the best possible outcomes in the years ahead.