

Aussie News

ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2011



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION



ABUJA

Aussie News

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Message from the High Commissioner



It is a great pleasure to write the welcome message for the inaugural Australian High Commission Newsletter for Abuja. This biannual publication is a means by which our colleagues/ friends/ and partners in Nigeria and the region will be able to find out what we at the High Commission have done in recent months, see what our current priorities are, and will be able to learn of future events.

The Australian High Commission team in Nigeria is a modest operation compared with some of the other diplomatic establishments based in Abuja. Nevertheless, we are a close knit and cohesive community with the principle aim of supporting Australia's interests in this region through deepening our relations with Nigeria and the countries we are accredited to. This newsletter is part of this outreach effort and we welcome any contributions you might have to improve the way we do this.

Our bilateral relationships in West Africa are growing strongly, albeit from a modest base. Apart from trade interests, there is enormous potential for investment in mining, for education services, for collaboration on agriculture and for the export of specialty products including foods and wine. We have a targeted and innovative development assistance program which is helping the countries of this region achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 (see in this edition for a summary of recent projects we have collaborated on). We work closely with Nigeria and the countries in this region on global issues of importance to us, including in the promotion of peace and security through our shared interest in the UN and climate change objectives.

We are delighted to announce a few special forthcoming Australian cultural events which will be hosted in the region. In 2011, apart from our Australia Day function and Anzac Day which will be open to our Abuja friends and partners, (the

former featuring some special Aussie delicacies and wine), we are hoping to host a film festival in Nigeria in 2011, and subsequently, an Australian Aboriginal Art Exhibition in early 2012 (Lagos and Abuja). Look out for more details on these and other events in our next newsletter.

We also would like to note to our Aussie compatriots our hope that all Australians living and working in Nigeria and the region register with the High Commission. Details of how to register are included in this newsletter. Your registration helps us if we need to circulate messages to you at short notice, and it also enables us to keep you up to date in relation to the High Commission calendar of activities and priorities and perhaps to visit you if we are travelling to your state of residence.

I look forward to working with you all in 2011, and wish you a prosperous and successful year.

Ian McConville

Meet the High Commission Team

From left to right:

Alfred Okesokun (Driver), Oluwafemi Esan (Accountant), David Davou (Driver of the High Commissioner), Mirella Mahlstein (Research Officer), Stuart Mooney (Second Secretary), Ian McConville (High Commissioner), Hakeem Lawal (Property Manager), Margaret Newman (Deputy High Commissioner), Denise Roads (PA to the High Commissioner), Latonia Dabiri-Mpamugo (Administrative Assistant), Alison Edey (Second Secretary), Patricia Okeji (Accountant), Emmanuel Affon (Driver).

Absent: Jane Heatherington (PA to the High Commissioner, currently on maternity leave).



“Aussie Bush Band Buskers”

ASOHOM Charity Bazaar 2010

and over 45 countries had stalls. Attendees could dine on everything from sushi through to donuts and bratwurst, have their face painted or pick up a pair of hand-made shoes. The chief guest was the wife of the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Mrs Ajumogobia, who even ran her own stall.

This year the Australian stall consisted of a good old Bun-nings-style sausage sizzle, some baked food and an Aussie Bush Band.

The rough but enthusiastic players, staffed by High Commission staff and friends, played through some classic Australian folk songs, alternating with foot-tapping Scottish jigs and reels. The crowd were happy to throw a few Naira (the Nigerian currency) into the guitar case – and some younger audience members plucked up the

courage to have a go on the lagerphone or other percussion instruments.

Many thanks to all those who plucked, strummed, tapped and bowed their way through the day, and those who braved the coals, spitting sausages and leaky tomato sauce bottles on the food stall! We hope to do it all again next October.

*Libby McCutchan
(Spouse of High Commissioner)*



Australian stall at the ASOHOM Charity Bazaar

Photos:
Courtesy of Hilary Ravenscroft

The residents of Abuja are a lot more familiar with the lyrics to “Botany Bay” and “Click Go the Shears” than they were at the start of 2010!

The annual ASOHOM (Association of Spouses of Heads of Mission) Charity Bazaar is a much anticipated event on the Abuja calendar. Now in its 5th successful year, the Bazaar is where Embassies and High Commissions showcase food and other produce of their country. All proceeds are pooled and used to support projects chosen by the ASOHOM Committee over the next year.

This year’s Bazaar (held in October at the Sheraton Hotel) was the most profitable ever,

The Australian High Commission's Development Cooperation Programs: DAP

Each year, the Australian High Commission in Abuja provides direct funding to grassroots organisations to support development projects in communities throughout Nigeria and increasingly to our other countries of accreditation.

The 2009-10 financial year was a very productive year for the High Commission. Through our two small grants programs, the Direct Aid Program (DAP) and the African Regional Small Activities Scheme (ARSAS), both of which are administered by the High Commission on behalf of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), we provided over AUD500,000 in funding to

43 projects that covered a diverse range of activities including the restoration of a market, the purchase of school equipment and the renovation of school buildings, the construction of boreholes and the establishment of a poultry farm.

Our project funding is a small part of the bilateral relationship between Australia and Nigeria, but for those of us working at the High Commission, it is amongst the most personally rewarding work that we do. And we are always looking for new and worthwhile projects to support. Below are some examples of the types of projects we have provided funding for during 2009-10.

DIRECT AID PROGRAM (DAP)

DAP is a small grants scheme that aims to alleviate humanitarian hardship through the funding of small scale development projects. The scheme provides grants to individuals, community groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are engaged in development activities on a non-profit basis, with emphasis on projects that support women, children, the disabled and those on the margins of society. In 2009-10, our DAP projects supported community health, education, water and sanitation, agricultural development, economic empowerment and the environment. Some examples include:



Australian High Commissioner, H.E. Ian McConville, and Second Secretary Alison Edge at the commissioning of a solar powered borehole in Plateau state

Water and Sanitation: With our assistance, boreholes and latrines were constructed in several different communities in the Federal Capital Territory

(FCT), Niger, Rivers, Bauchi, Anambra and Plateau states. On 17 December 2010, the High Commissioner attended the commissioning of a solar

powered borehole in Tokbet Community in Plateau state, the first project of this type supported by the High Commission.

Students performing at the ceremony for the commissioning of the Mangu Science Lab



Education: Funding has been provided for the renovation of schools, the provision of school furniture and the building of pit latrines in communities in the FCT, Abia, Nasarawa, Edo, Plateau, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Taraba states. Given the importance of science and technology education, the High Commission also funded a science laboratory at the Mangu Government Senior Secondary School in Plateau state, which encouraged the state government to provide the school with science equipment. The laboratory was inaugurated on 28 October, 2010.

Agricultural Development: During the year, we supported the purchase of agricultural equipment for palm oil, cassava and cereal processing in Imo and Akwa Ibom states. These types of projects are particularly empowering for women as the equipment replaces laborious and time consuming manual processes usually undertaken by women and allows them to generate higher financial returns and thereby strengthen their independence.



Alison Edye & Stuart Mooney with staff from the NGO Centre for the Right to Health, which received funding under DAP in June 2010, and primary health care workers at a medical centre in the FCT



Community Health: Our program for the year included the renovation of two medical centres and the purchase of hospital equipment in the FCT and Ebonyi state. We also provided DAP funds to an Abuja-based NGO – Centre for the Right to Health – to undertake several workshops on reproductive health and modern contraceptives, targeting primary health care workers in the FCT.

Nigerian Fistula Foundation: In 2009-10, the High Commission continued with its support for



Some of the Obstetric Fistula patients

the Kano based Nigerian Fistula Foundation. Following on for a skills acquisition project the previous year for women with untreatable obstetric fistula, the High Commission funded a surgical intervention that enabled 40 women and girls to undergo much needed treatment. After receiving the required surgical attention, women who were previously ostracised from their communities were reintegrated and were able to reconnect with their families.

The Australian High Commission's Development Cooperation Programs: ARSAS/CGS

AFRICAN REGIONAL SMALL ACTIVITY SCHEME (ARSAS) - AUSTRALIA AFRICA COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME (CGS)

The ARSAS is a larger scale funding mechanism that aims to promote sustainable economic and social development. In the past year, the High Commission has funded 11 projects in Nigeria under ARSAS and, for the first time, a project in Cameroon. In 2010-11, ARSAS will be replaced by the new Australia Africa Community Grants Scheme (CGS).

In Imo state, the High Commission funded a *poultry project* that aims to reintroduce poultry keeping into rural communities, thus creating jobs and providing a regular supply of eggs and meat. Families in the community who participate in the project receive a number of chicks on a revolving loan basis (i.e. no cash up front), which is repaid after six months when the chickens can brood and be



Latonia Dabiri-Mpamugo with local dignitaries in front of the new market stalls, Item community, Abia state

sold. Funds from the sale of chickens are then reinvested back into the project. The DAP Committee recently visited the project site in Imo state to evaluate its progress.

In Abia State, we provided funding for the rehabilitation of the Item *community market* – built over 50 years ago – which included the renovation of market stalls and the installation of pit latrines. The upgraded market has improved and enlarged the socioeconomic activities of the mostly women traders in the community.

Grants have also supported the *renovation of two community schools*, the purchase of *school furniture and science equipment*, the acquisition of a mechanised *palm oil processing mill*, the rehabilitation and equipping of two *medical centres* and the realisation of *boreholes projects* in Abia, Anambra, Adamawa, Taraba States and the FCT.

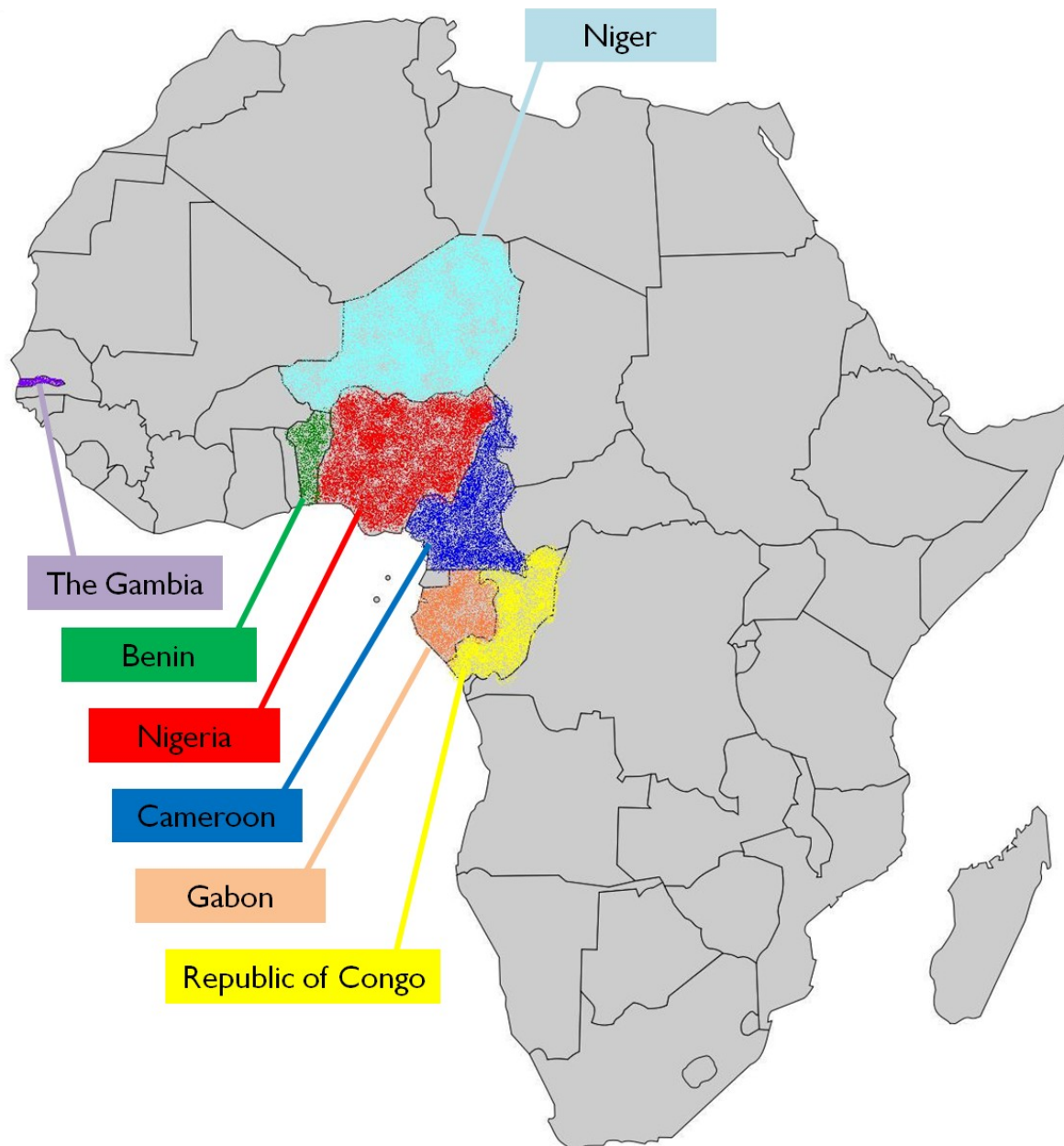
In Cameroon, a grant was provided to a local Cameroonian NGO in Buea - Forestry, Agriculture, Animal and Fishery Network - to *rehabilitate water catchment areas* on Mount Cameroon. This includes the building of tanks and the rejuvenation of the plants around the water catchment areas. The primary benefit of the project to the communities involved is to secure future access to water resources, which are currently under pressure from encroachment and economic development.



At site of the poultry in Imo state

Our Countries of Accreditation

Although the High Commission is based in Abuja, we are responsible for managing Australia's diplomatic relations with six other countries apart from Nigeria, shown in the map below:



Australians are involved in a range of diverse activities in this region, including in the mining sectors in Niger, Cameroon, Gabon and Congo (Brazzaville), in International Organizations such as the

World Food Programme (The Gambia), and in the field of development assistance.

This is an exciting stage of Australia's engagement in the region given that diplomatic relations have only recently been

established with the Republic of Niger and the Republic of Congo, and that it has been many years since we had official accreditation to the Republics of Gabon and Benin.

Presentation of Credentials

The High Commissioner has had a busy few months with visits to neighbouring countries to present credentials (which is an act whereby a diplomat presents documents to another country's leadership, designating him/her as the Ambassador



... Ian Mc Conville (Australie) ...



or High Commissioner to that other country). First, the High Commissioner presented to Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in September 2010, after which he presented to President Yayi Boni of the Republic of Benin later in the same month. In October, the High Commissioner undertook similar visits to the Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville) to call on President Sassou-Nguesso, and to the Republic

of Cameroon to present the 'copie figurée' to the Minister of External Relations, Mr Ayissi. Then in November, the High Commissioner travelled to The Gambia to present to President Jammeh, and in December to Gabon to meet with President Ali Bongo (see picture).

Remembrance Day Ceremony



On 6-7 November 2010, the High Commissioner and his family attended a Remembrance Day ceremony in Kano, northern Nigeria, at the invitation of the British High Commissioner. The High Commissioner laid a wreath in memory of two Australian Servicemen who are buried in the Commonwealth Graves Cemetery. Also in attendance were the Canadian High Commissioner and the French Ambassador, as well as local dignitaries.

One of the highlights was the playing of the bagpipes by a British army Ghurkha who had flown in from the UK especially for the ceremony.



The 'Aussies and Friends in Lagos'

The High Commission is pleased to convey greetings from the 'Aussies and Friends in Lagos', a "scattered bunch infiltrating a wide array of businesses and activities through

this bustling metropolis". The Aussies and Friends in Lagos welcome with open arms all those from the Oceanic region to join in on any of the activities in which they are involved.

If you would like to join the Aussies, Kiwis and Birds of Paradise who are already on the group mailing list, then please send an email to:

**Tirscha McPherson at tmacca72@gmail.com
or Barry Phipps at bhipps@aislagos.com**

A major fund raising venture for the women's organisations in Lagos is a *Small World*, which will be held on Saturday 19 February 2011. It is a night of festivities that has over 30 nationalities manning stalls that display fares and delicacies from their region. Fresh fruit, desserts and Aussie wines will be served at the Aussies and Friends in Lagos booth to im-

press upon visitors just what they have in store for themselves if they ever venture down-under.

People should buy a ticket before the event (because they sell-out quickly) and each women's group receives a share of the proceeds to be used for development projects throughout the region. This year the theme for the event is

"Go Green" and to encourage students to keep the "green" light switched on in their education, the Aussies and Friends in Lagos want to provide student desks and chairs to a local junior secondary school. In addition to this, they will provide funds for the establishment of a borehole and tank at a school on the mainland and keep their lights of learning GREEN.

*It really is a
"Small World"
after all*

Australia Day in Lagos

Once again, this year the Aussies and Friends in Lagos will be celebrating Australia Day in Nigeria's biggest city. Wendy and Dave Beenie will be hosting the get together again at their

compound on Saturday 22 January at 4pm. True to the Aussie tradition, it is BYO meat and drinks and a salad or dessert to share at the BBQ. All Aussies and other Oceanic friends are most welcome.

Please RSVP to:

**Tirscha McPherson at tmacca72@gmail.com
or Wendy Beenie at d.beenie@hotmail.com**

...so that they can get an idea of numbers.

Remembering the ANZACs

In 2010 the Aussies and Friends in Lagos joined together to remember the fallen at an Aussie compatriot's compound in Lagos. In 2011 there is a possibility of a more symbolic location at which this important

day could be held. At present, the Aussies and Friends in Lagos are attempting to locate the graves of some lost Aussie pilots who are apparently laying at rest in the Lagos environs. If their resting place can be dis-

covered, the Aussies and Friends in Lagos are considering holding its ANZAC service with them this year.

Public Diplomacy

An important part of the High Commissioner's work is promoting a clear understanding of

Australia's foreign and trade policies and priorities as well as the cultural diversity of Australia. To this end, we are pleased

to announce a series of upcoming public diplomacy events that we are organising.

Australia Day food and wine event

First, we'll be showcasing Australian food and wine at an event hosted by the High Commissioner at the official residence in Abuja for the Australia Day ceremony, which will be

held on 27 January 2011. This will be a great opportunity to enjoy delicious cuisine and wines and to taste a little bit of Australia in Nigeria.



International Women's Day

The next event we're planning will be held on 8 March 2011, which will be a luncheon hosted by the High Commissioner for the International Women's Day, a day of international celebration of women. Women have made enormous contributions to Nigeria and this will be a chance to remember their important role.



showcasing the richness and diversity of Indigenous Australia and the importance with which we view environmental issues, will be made even more enjoyable because it will be accompanied by more great Australian food and wine.

And later in the year, at a date still to be fixed, we're excited about arranging the screening in Abuja of a documentary film, 'Fighting Carbon with Fire', which will be accompanied by the showing of an indigenous-themed feature film. This night,

We are proud that this will be the first time such an event has been staged in Nigeria by the High Commission, and we are sure that it, and the other upcoming public diplomacy events, will be fun and help project a vibrant image of modern Australia.

Documentary film screening: 'Fighting Carbon with Fire'



Picture above: courtesy of Tourism Australia (<http://australia.com>)

Visa Information in Nigeria

Australia, as a multicultural and open country, welcomes people from all places to either visit or make Australia their home for good. In either case, if you aren't an Australian citizen, you must remember to obtain a visa before you travel.

To ensure people in Nigeria and surrounding countries are able to submit visa applications more efficiently, from 1 June 2010 the High Commission announced new arrangements for the handling of visa applications in Nigeria. It is important to note that the High Commission in Abuja does not accept

or facilitate the processing of visas to Australia. Instead, you should lodge applications for visas directly with **VFS Global**, with which the High Commission has entered into an agreement to assist with the facilitation of visa applications to Australia's High Commission in **Pretoria, South Africa**, where they are considered.

VFS is located in **Abuja** at:

**Plot Number 42,
Door No 38,
Lobito Crescent,
Wuse 2**

and in **Ikeja, Lagos** at:

**No 16, Billings Way,
Ground and 1st Floor,
Oregun Industrial Area**

VFS is open between 0800 and 1500 Monday to Friday. You can find more information here:

- website: www.vfsglobal.com/australia/nigeria/
- via email: info.ausng@vfshelpline.com
- by phone: 09 8701519

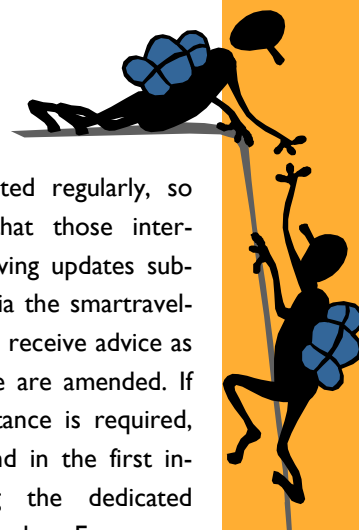
Consular Information

An important function of the High Commission is to protect the legitimate interests of Australians overseas and to assist in ensuring their welfare. As such we are committed to providing effective, prompt and courteous consular services, delivered in an equitable way, to all Australians requiring them. In order for us to help Australians, it is important that they register with us so that we can contact them in an emergency.

This can be done easily via the 'smartraveller' website, at <http://smartraveller.gov.au>

Through the smartraveller website Australians can also find information about travelling overseas and on the consular services the High Commission can provide. Importantly, there is also a link to the travel advisories for Nigeria and the other countries for which we are responsible. These adviso-

ries are updated regularly, so we suggest that those interested in receiving updates subscribe, again via the smartraveller website, to receive advice as to when these are amended. If consular assistance is required, we recommend in the first instance calling the dedicated 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre hotline, which can be reached at +61 2 6261 3305.





The AHC staff and families wish you a very happy 2011!

Registration Info for Australians abroad

Registering with us is easy:

Go to the Australian Government's travel advisory and consular information service (<http://smartraveller.gov.au>) and follow the link to register.

And please provide an email address so we can send you a copy of the newsletter!



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All pictures on the front cover: courtesy of Tourism Australia
(<http://australia.com>)