



9

The Blessing African Boutique and City Market Food: A Congolese Refugee Business in Darwin, Australia

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9.1 Country-Specific Information and Data

Refugees escape their countries of origin for several reasons, including war, persecution and natural and environmental disasters. It must also be recognized that the refugee phenomenon is not new. What is new is the recognition and acknowledgment of the fact that the extent of the contributions that refugees make to both their host country and to themselves and their families is by and large dependent upon the opportunities they are presented with. Not all refugees are the same. Therefore, they cannot be portrayed as homogenous by nature. The extent of their contributions is dependent upon many factors, including refugee policy in the host nations.

The national policy on refugees, where it exists, is a factor that affects the contributions of individual refugees. Individuals who are refugees, dependent on the national refugee policies, are either portrayed as a burden and a drain on a nation's economic resources or as making substantial

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individual contributions to the nation state. National policies can sometimes assist in unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit, as the amount of money refugees receive is not sufficient to achieve economic independence. “Work for the Dole activities will give you the chance to build the skills that employers want, like teamwork, communication and reliability; increase your confidence and show you are ready for work and meet new people and make contacts who can be a referee for you when you apply for jobs be involved in your local community” (<https://docs.jobs.gov.au/documents/work-dole-information-job-seekers>).

“Centrelink’s main role with Work for the Dole is enforcing sanctions when unemployed people don’t take part” (Karlsen et al. 2011).

Some of these refugees are no longer dependent on government subsidies. They have either gone into formal employment or embarked on entrepreneurship. Research has proven that “Humanitarian migrants were the most entrepreneurial while skilled migrants generated the most income in 2009–2010, according to figures released for the first time by the Australian Bureau of Statistics” (Collins 2016; ABS 4 September 2015). The term “humanitarian migrants” refers to refugees and asylum seekers.

The displacement levels are escalating, with a record of 65.6 million people worldwide who have been forced from their homeland. Of this number, nearly 22.5 million are refugees, with over half the population being under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2017). Australia has a small level of refugee recognition. In 2016, 6567 asylum seekers were recognized as refugees in Australia, as compared to Germany, who recognized 443,210 and Uganda, who recognized 532,735 as refugees during the same year (Fact Check 2017).

While “UNHCR recommends or refers people for resettlement, Australia’s Immigration Department has the ultimate decision on whether to grant a visa. The country has four offshore refugee category visas”:

1. Refugee (visa subclass 200): This visa is for people who are subject to persecution in their home country and are in need of resettlement. The majority of applicants who are considered under this category are identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and referred to the Australian Government for resettlement consideration.

2. In-Country Special Humanitarian (visa subclass 201): This visa offers resettlement to people who have suffered persecution in their country of nationality or usual residence and who have not been able to leave that country to seek refuge elsewhere. It is designed for those living in their home country and subject to persecution in their home country.
3. Emergency Rescue (visa subclass 203): This visa offers an accelerated processing arrangement for people who satisfy refugee criteria and whose lives or freedom depend on urgent resettlement. It is for those who are subject to persecution in their home country and assessed to be in a situation such that delays due to normal processing could put their lives or freedom in danger.
4. Woman at Risk (visa subclass 204): This visa is for female applicants and their dependents who are subject to persecution or are of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimization, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender. The majority of applicants who are considered under this category are identified and referred to the Australian Government by the UNHCR (Woman at Risk Visa (Subclass 204) (Karlsen et al. 2011)).

The Refugee Council of Australia records that as of September 30 2017, a total of 36,362 Bridging Visa E (BVEs) were granted to Illegal Maritime Arrivals (IMA). Of these, 20,599 remain in the community. BVE (subclass 050–051) is a temporary visa. If your substantive visa has ended, it lets you stay in Australia lawfully while you make arrangements to leave, finalize your immigration matter or are waiting for an immigration decision. It does not let you reenter Australia if you leave (Illegal Maritime Arrivals on Bridging Visa E September 2017).

Australia is a country built on migration. Every year, Australia welcomes over 190,000 migrants. Australia also has a long history of successfully resettling refugees and is a world leader in refugee resettlement. Since federation, Australia has welcomed more than 850,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants who have enriched the nation enormously.

Newly arrived refugees and migrants can face extra challenges in seeking employment. A well-recognized and significant aspect of successful settlement is gaining stable, adequate remuneration and fulfilling employment. They benefit from the federal government's Work for the Dole scheme, which provides crucial exposure to, and experience of, Australian workplaces, according to a leading settlement agency (Refugee Council of Australia 2011).

Work for the Dole is part of the Australian Government's jobactive employment service. It is a work experience program designed to help job seekers gain new skills while they look for work. "It connects job seekers with employers and is delivered by a network of jobactive providers in over 1700 locations across Australia" (<https://www.jobs.gov.au/jobactive>). As a part of Work for the Dole, host organizations get access to extra sets of hands to undertake activities and projects that may not normally get done. This helps job seekers gain the skills, experience and confidence they need to move off of welfare and into a job.

Work for the Dole places cannot replace paid work positions or involve tasks that would normally be done by a paid employee. This includes casual and part-time employees and reductions in hours or customary overtime usually allocated to a paid worker. It also places job seekers in activities where they can gain skills and experience that give back to the community and can help them find a job.

Eligible job seekers registered with a job-active provider will need to participate in Work for the Dole or another approved activity for six months each year to keep receiving their income support if they have mutual obligation requirements.

According to Abbott, (2000), "Work for the Dole is organized in the local community, by the local community, for the local community". Job-active providers work with host organizations to identify suitable activities (Abbott 2000).

This is the unique life story of Edouard, who went through difficult situations and yet proved that when the spirit of success is prevalent in an individual, they will live to fulfil their dreams. One's background and surroundings do not determine one's destination. It is the personality of the individual that dominates the outcome, so long as an opportunity presents itself.

Originally, Edouard was a social entrepreneur in the DRC. In Australia, he became an economic entrepreneur for social purposes and uses his

social family network to grow his business. His personal attributes did not change from the DRC to Australia. The status of “refugee” did not hinder Edouard from achieving; instead, he came out of the “refugee” cocoon and proved his importance in the business community. Edouard is a proud owner of Blessing African Boutique and City Market Food, which started from humble beginnings as Blessing African Boutique in 2013.

Edouard was very open and willing to share his story of the journey from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Darwin, Australia, which provides a clear vision to view the importance of one’s life from a different platform.

The determination to succeed and grow in business despite the constraints he has faced is a testimony to what refugees can achieve if they are presented with an opportunity. Edouard, as a social entrepreneur, has reached many communities and impacted the members of the community in which he lives, inspiring many to join the business sector.

9.2 Personal History of Reasons for Leaving One’s Home Country

Edouard Ndjamba Ndjoku was born and raised in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, also known as the DRC, approximately 50 years ago. He is married, and the couple has six children: three boys and three girls. Edouard and his family live in Darwin, Australia, where he is a sole trader.

Like everyone else, Edouard had hopes of spending all his life in the DRC. He was looking forward to contributing economically and politically to his nation. Little did he know, that he was destined to live in Australia.

While he was in the DRC, Edouard made a living by connecting sales people and potential customers and earning commission. Edouard studied for a National Diploma in mathematics and physics in the DRC. He also studied for an architectural degree in the DRC for three years, which he did not complete due to the situation in the DRC. Unfortunately, he could not take the same course in Darwin because of family commitments.

He was also a leader of a Christian group. Edouard used to assist rural people with transportation of their farm produce. He was a social entrepreneur. As an architectural student, Edouard used to assist people in starting small businesses, mainly in the construction industry.

Things started to go wrong when he denounced the actions of the Congolese government in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a human rights activist, he was victimized by the present government, and some members were victims of torture and stress and were traumatized because of his denunciation of the financial fraud and unlawful exploitation of Congolese resources overseas by international communities. He became a wanted man by the political police.

9.3 Personal Reasons for and Circumstances of Traveling to the Specific Host Country

Edouard fled through Brazzaville (Republic of Congo) to the nearby Republic of Angola. Things did not work out well for him in Angola, so he went to Zambia–Lusaka, where he stayed for nine months as an asylum seeker. Life was not easy for Edouard in the refugee camp, so he moved to South Africa, where people were suffering from hunger and joblessness. Edouard's life was going in circles, hopping from nation to nation, faced with harsh conditions. Going back to the DRC was not an option because of the political situation. He then moved to Zimbabwe, where life was at least marginally better.

Edouard was yearning to connect with his family, especially his wife and children, yet he did not know how this would happen. When Edouard left Kinshasa, his wife moved with their children to her family in Katanga. There was no contact between them. He continued to seek a safe place to live, hoping for a miracle to unite him with his family.

Eventually, a pastor helped to reunite Edouard and his family. By that time Edouard, had two children with his wife, and their third child was born in Zimbabwe. This proved challenging; their child was refused citizenship despite being born in that nation.

Edouard had a spirit of entrepreneurship in him. Despite the hardships he faced, the spirit of entrepreneurship did not die. While in Zimbabwe, he managed to work as the manager of a band.

Edouard's refugee status was initially refused, only to be granted after he presented an inscription from a book (*Jeune Afrique Magazine/Youth Africa Magazine*) found in the Alliance Francaise library in Lusaka. The inscription was the only evidence he had, and it referred to his speech at one a press conference he had given in the DRC where he denounced the government.

Edouard travelled from his homeland through various countries seeking assistance until he was granted refugee status in Australia, where his status changed from refugee to entrepreneur. He has contributed economically to the nation of Australia through his business. He created new markets for domestic commodities. His products are valuable to the general development of the community. The community relies on these products. As an entrepreneur, Edouard invests in a diverse range of products and services that the people need. This ensures a better life for the people in the community because various types of goods and services are at their disposal. He also promotes international trade by importing some of his products from abroad. The increase of products and services through Edouard's business pushes the gross national product (GNP) to a higher level. This plays an important role in the growth of the national income, as well as raising individual per capita income.

9.4 Business Data and History of Establishing Business

Life in Australia was not easy for Edouard. He arrived in Australia in October 2007 and, together with his family, he was given transitional accommodation for three weeks, in exchange for a small rental payment, by Melaleuca Refugee. Melaleuca Refugee Centre (MRC) provides counselling and early settlement support services to refugees and facilitates community development programs in the areas of cultural transition, strengthening families and peace leadership.¹ Thus, Melaleuca takes an

integrated approach to supporting people from refugee backgrounds. MRC is the lead provider of services to people from refugee backgrounds in the Northern Territory (NT) and is the NT member of the National Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) (Melaluca Annual Report-2013_2014).

Later, Edouard and his family were introduced to Centrelink, where they would be able to receive an allowance for survival in Australia. Centrelink is part of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and delivers a range of payments and services for people at times of major change. These include government benefits and payments to support new arrivals in Australia. Centrelink “provides a range of services to help support migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants settle into life in Australia” (<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/information-in-your-language>).

After three months, Edouard and his family moved to Melaleuca Accommodation, a private house rental, with the assistance of Melaleuca Refugee Centre. The allowances from Centrelink were not enough to cover the family’s needs. He moved from government assistance—Centrelink—into formal employment, until he was able to become an entrepreneur.

Edouard looked for a job to enable him look after his immediate family in Australia and his extended family in the DRC. He was referred to Palmerston Schools Service Providers, who assessed his qualifications. The policy of this service provider was to provide assessment of the qualifications held by individuals. The results would sort the candidate into different streams, with one option being a stream where individuals are able to look for employment without assistance. This is the stream into which Edouard was placed.

The Congolese network is very small in Darwin, but they managed to connect Edouard to a cleaning job. The focus of the network and the client base expanded to encompass the wider west African network. This network eventually connected Edouard to a factory job through a Sudanese colleague. Then, a Nigerian colleague connected him to a support worker job, based on his credentials. Edouard worked for Carpentaria Disability. He had a second job as a taxi driver, which he later stopped because it was too stressful. He later found another job through the

Internet as a youth worker with Lifestyle Solutions, where he worked for six years. During this time, Edouard realized that he could establish a business and make money and he therefore started his own business. The business offers products and services, such as hair styling products and other African items, mainly to the west African community and indigenous customers.

Edouard did his best to live an independent life until he was able to overcome all the challenges he had experienced and join the business community. He encouraged himself to pursue his dream of entrepreneurship, which was realized when he established his first business, Blessing African Boutique in 2013. While other refugees, some of whom were former business people in their home nations, might have failed to pursue their business goals, Edouard did not give up. The spirit of entrepreneurship prevailed.

9.5 Individual Enablers and Constraints

Edouard refused to be limited by his circumstances.

Blessing African Boutique and City Market Food is a one-stop-shop for all, providing the community with a variety of goods and services which include African food, clothing and hair products, to name just a few.

Edouard saw an opportunity to venture into business, and this kept him positive even when he did not have the financial resources to pursue his goal. He had no collateral to secure funds from any financial institution. He had no credit history, nor was he creditworthy enough to be considered for any type of loan in Australia. Some refugees have since resorted to microfinance to start their dream businesses in Australia (ABC news 2017).

Venturing into business was not an easy task for Edouard, and it was made more difficult based on his circumstances and challenging personal history. In the DRC, starting a business is very easy, unlike in Australia, where the processes involve registration, insurance and Australian Business Number (ABN).

Edouard's business is a sole proprietorship, but he receives assistance from his wife, who manages the businesses. Being a sole trader allows

him, as the owner, to be in control. His wife contributes greatly to the business. While he is busy with other things, his wife takes control and is very familiar with the business environment. In fact, she is the only person running and working in the salon, since Edouard cannot do it. The older children have their commitments elsewhere, while the younger ones are in school.

9.6 Community Enablers and Constraints

As a small business owner, Edouard relied on family loans as a source of finance (Romano et al. 2001). His status did not allow him to access a loan from financial institutions. Edouard is in a group of 30 people and they have what they call *likenemba roustine*. Each member contributes a stated amount of 500 dollars fortnightly, and the money is given to the first member in line. The order is chosen through a ballot. Each member picks up a number which determines their position in the group. This is how Edouard raised the capital to start his business. This has encouraged many people within this community, and many lives have been transformed and many now own their own houses.

Community engagement is one of the major enablers of effective businesses (Cavaye 2004). Edouard is a very hardworking individual, both at home and in the community. He is engaged in many community activities, which includes being the president of the DRC community in Darwin. He has compassion for his people, which is one of the main reasons that he decided to establish a business that provides native food and clothing to the community. His influential position in the community makes it easier for Edouard to encourage peace among families. In return, Edouard has gained respect from the community, and the community—as his main customer base—contributes to his business.

The community contributes to his business by influencing the various types of products they expect Edouard to supply. They support these choices by purchasing those products. Suggestions and feedback have helped the growth of this business as it has led to high customer satisfaction.

However, there are some constraints due to transportation of goods, which leads to high pricing. This is something beyond Edouard's control, considering that is the trend in the NT because of distance.

Edouard's business clients are from all walks of life, though the African community members are his primary customer base. Indigenous people are also clients of Edouard's business. The business is open to everyone, and it is very easy to access.

Edouard's business has various suppliers. The products come mainly from China, Thailand, South Africa, Nigeria and the DRC. Sometimes, Edouard travels to other states, such as Melbourne and Perth, to source products from other African businesses. Though Edouard can live and do business in these states, which would be a cheaper option, the compassion he has for the community in Darwin anchors him to that region.

9.7 Institutional Enablers and Constraints

Edouard faced challenges in starting his business, which included failure to raise capital due to his lack of credit history, assets or collateral. Furthermore, his qualifications were not recognized in Australia.

Despite having gone through hardships in his life, Edouard maintained a strong will of entrepreneurship. Being a refugee in a foreign land was not a threat to Edouard. Instead, it was an opportunity pursue his dream on entrepreneurship. It was the right time start a business, a goal he had nurtured for a long time. This was the right time and place for a breakthrough in Edouard's life. His compassion for others still continues in Edouard's business and is fulfilled every day.

Every business has its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as enablers and inhibitors. As a sole trader, Edouard understands the importance of certain processes which affect the business both positively and negatively. Decision making is a very major aspect of business (Venkatesh et al. 2002). The individual spirit of entrepreneurship and personal drive to source scarce products to suit the community's needs was one of the main reasons that made Edouard to go into business.

The business is achieving its stated objectives as planned. It has grown from having a few things on its shelves to filling the shop. This includes

connecting the community to their home countries by introducing Lycamobile international SIM cards. His business performance has improved since 2013. In comparison to similar African businesses, his business is performing very well. It has developed customer relations with indigenous people as well as other customers from different nationalities.

Certain constraints, such as import policies and security, deterred him from accessing products from some nations since he had no knowledge of how to do so. Edouard's experience as a social entrepreneur in the DRC enabled him to understand the government processes.

9.8 Methodological Considerations

The main methodological tool we used was first to define "refugee" and "entrepreneur". The Guardian, in an article dated September 4 2015, described refugees as "migrants who arrived as refugees" or "Humanitarian migrants", who generated income through entrepreneurship (Jacobsen 2002). An entrepreneur is defined as "An entrepreneur is a person who organizes and manages a business undertaking assuming the risk for the sake of profit. An entrepreneur sees an opportunity, makes a plan, starts a business, manages the business and receives the profits" (SBDC).

Understanding these two terms made it easier for us to conduct this case study. The other issue that helped with the success of this study was the availability and willingness of Edouard to provide information in a timely manner. He had all the information we required at his fingertips.

Though Edouard and his family are now settled in a safe country, anxiety and at times panic persisted, specifically due to worry about his family members that still remain in Africa. The psychological challenges of separation are numerous and complex, as is the uncertainty of their safety and the strength of parental affection, which contributed significantly to his anxiety. He misses that closeness with his extended family. He cannot go back to the DRC because of the cruelty, atrocities and calamities. There are no indication of changes happening in the DRC; instead, things were getting worse.

Some refugees might encounter traumatic situations and also experience family separation. This could hinder their progression into business,

even though the entrepreneurship spirit might still be embedded within them. Edouard has overcome this phase.

Not all refugees are entrepreneurs or in business: only those who bear the seed of entrepreneurship. As a result, the methodology we used in analyzing this case was to incorporate a view that we as outsiders will never be able to grasp the complexities faced by refugee entrepreneurs. Hence, Edouard also contributed to this case analysis as a coauthor to bring an insider's perspective to the discussion.

It is the methodology of inquiry that liberates or constrains the minds of those who consider refugee policy. It is hoped that the methodology used here has provided a *raison d'être* for refugee policy to be reexamined from the perspective of the refugee entrepreneur.

Notes

1. "Peace leadership is the mobilization of action for just change. When people are motivated to act individually and function collectively for the benefit of humanity and the planet, peace leadership is present" (Miller and Green 2015).

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