

**Diversity Management Strategies: Community Driven Employment:  
Congolese Experience in Shepparton**

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## 1. Abstract

Among recommendations of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA) (May, 2003) report the Review of Re-Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants included seeking further opportunities to settle humanitarian entrants in regional Australia. Key recommendations of this and other reports included:

- Although deemed structurally correct, the system of bringing and supporting Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants required improvements in implementation. <sup>1</sup>
- This was to be achieved by liaising more closely with relevant stakeholders regarding (suitable) regional location, and (identifying where) appropriate services and community support exist or may be developed <sup>2</sup>
- Noted also were the complex nature and substantial disadvantages experienced by refugees and humanitarian entrants, requiring targeted approaches to re-settlement service provision. <sup>3</sup>

Based on the above, and working with the various interest groups and the City of Greater Shepparton, it was decided under a pilot program, to receive refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) into the Shepparton region. Through internal migration, Sudanese and other Refugees, notably Afghans, arrived around the same time adding to the Albanians, Turkish and the substantial Iraqi refugee population in the region. The Congolese settlement project has marked for the first time, the selection of refugees directly from overseas camps to rural Australia/Victoria without first settling in major metropolitan cities.

Significantly, this paper critically evaluates the pilot program's developments based on the perspectives of the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and Districts (ECSD), with emphasis on the experience in assisting new arrivals into successful settlement. Included among the roles of the ECSD is: where to find the various services, accommodation, education, employment, health and preparing the local community. Notably, this paper focuses more on community initiatives to employment in regard to the Congolese than the rest of support and assistance to the refugees and humanitarian newly arrived in the region provided by the ECSD. The impetus that has led to relatively positive outcomes has arisen from community ownership of the pilot project, commitment, receptiveness, and working as a team, re-settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants with positive attitudes, diligence, gaining and giving respect to others. The parties' involvement and ownership of the project, building trust, collaborations and partnerships played the most fundamental roles.

Key wording/phrases from this paper:

Community ownership of the project, Commitment, receptiveness, and working as a team, re-settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants in rural Victoria/Australia, diligence, gaining and giving respect to others, the parties' involvement and ownership of the project, building trust, collaborations and partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> *Review of Re-Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*. D.I.M.I.A. May, 2003

<sup>2</sup> (Review Report on the re-settlement Services 2003/4).

<sup>3</sup> (The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy 2004).

## 2. Introduction

Theories on broad society's warm welcome of arrivals tend to be relocated from the preceding incidents of the same society (Cheung-on Lo, 1979). The Goulburn region (Shepparton) had received, welcomed, and settled arrivals in the past generally influenced by the pull factors like: irrigated agriculture benefits, making money through farm employment, ethnicity, religion and related areas connections, skill migration, a large regional rural township in close proximity to Melbourne, welcoming/inclusive and thriving multi-cultural community, a lifestyle benefited by good climate, clean environment, family values, and other factors (Regional Women's Advisory Council Study 2005). These motives have linked the arrivals, thus propagated their welcome and support structures.

For the Congolese, it is the first time ever in Australia to settle Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants straight from overseas camps into a rural region without being propelled by the said pull factors (Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) Pilot Project Minutes of September 2005). Therefore, the Congolese constituted the un-connected category for which only community support would facilitate their settlement and integration (DIAC comments in the first meeting that selected the group). As human beings can be pro-active and engaged or alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function (Ryan, & Deci 2000), motivation (intrinsic & extrinsic), psychological comfort, quick and timely responses to the Congolese immediate needs became a central focus by the volunteers and Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) providers. This, community ownership of the process, and networks developed; all these have made substantial contributions to the apparently a success story. Noted also is that the broad community had been partly prepared through media coverage, involvements and engagement of the main society institutions in the pre-preparation; all of which actions helped to build community networks focused towards successful settlement (Nsubuga-Kyobe, September 2006, and Piper, March 2007).

Community leadership of the various institutions has had a vital role, part of which later on was defined by the sub-committees of the main Steering Committee established to oversee the project. The foregoing is where community driven employment initiatives' discussion is relocated, after skimming over the overview to the background and development of the pilot project.

### 3. Project Background and Development

In early 2005 DIMIA (now DIAC)) initiated a consultative process in Shepparton to determine the level of local support for a pilot IHSS project to directly settle African refugees in the Region.

The pilot project resulted from agreement at State and Federal level to address the settlement needs of humanitarian entrants while at the same time, reversing depopulation and resolving labour and skill shortages in regional centres. This agreement is best represented by the following reports:

- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' (DIMA) 2003 *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* which recommended "that DIMA seek further opportunities to settle humanitarian entrants in regional Australia and liaise more closely with relevant stakeholders regarding regional locations where employment opportunities exist and appropriate services and community support exist or may be developed". This recommendation was made in the light of the expression of considerable interest by regional stakeholders during the consultation process for the review;
- The August 2004 report of the Commonwealth-Victoria Working Party on Migration, which supported the trialing of regional settlement in Victoria, subject to the identification of a suitable location or locations.
- Before determining that Shepparton to be the pilot site DIMIA mapped what was considered to be essential services in regional locations and developed criteria to guide selection of the pilot location
- A commitment from three levels of government to work together to ensure necessary services are in place;
- Major services, including Centrelink, Job Network agencies, health, welfare and housing services, these were essential and to be available as well as being sensitive to the needs of humanitarian entrants;
- A commitment from local employers who have appropriate employment opportunities to offer to humanitarian entrants;
- Support from the local community so as to facilitate a welcoming environment;
- Access to or easy provision of specialist services, including the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), specialist torture and trauma and health services, education for the young members of the families, and other infrastructural support systems, e.g. affordable housing.

The Victorian Government was a strong supporter of the pilot concept and Shepparton and Warnambool emerged as preferred locations for the pilot. A summary of the profile of these locations is provided above in Table 1.0

Shepparton expressed strong support however Warnambool had recently received a number of Sudanese families, relocated from Melbourne, and they wanted to consolidate support for this group before accepting another entrant group.

Table 1.0

Location	Population	Diversity	ARIA Rating	Unemployment Rate	Type of Employment
City of Greater Shepparton	59,589	7.5%	Highly Accessible	3.8%	dairying, horticulture, viticulture, tomato industry, transport
City of Warrnambool	30,354	1.9%	Highly Accessible	5.8%	retail, tourism, education, health, dairy, meat processing, clothing manufacture, construction

#### 4. The Shepparton Historic Experience

The City of Greater Shepparton (COGS) has a strong, diverse economy and a long history of multicultural settlement. The early waves of Italians and Greeks were followed by Albanians, Turks and entrants from many other parts of the world and there are now people from between 30 and 40 different nationalities living in Shepparton (Cultural Diversity and Economic Development in Four Regional Australian Communities: Dept of Transport and Regional Services 2005).

Since the mid 90's substantial increase of a humanitarian refugees have been arriving. These include Arabic speaking from the Middle East and predominantly Iraqi, subsequently followed by the Albanians from Kosovo, Afghans and Sudanese. The characteristic of the latter groups has been secondary migration as distinct from the direct settlement proposed by the pilot.

An accurate number of Iraqis is difficult to obtain and estimates vary from 1,600 to 3500 with the number fluctuating seasonally.

Many of the Iraqis were on Temporary Protection Visas and could not access the services generally available to refugees. This had both positive and negative implications to host community, thus instigating a response.

The Iraqi "crisis" led to the 2001 Building Links project, which established the Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Planning Committee, sponsored by COGS, GOTAFE and the Ethnic Council. The Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Plan (GVISP) was established intended to provide a framework for a coordinated approach to settlement planning in the region, as well reflecting the objectives of both State and Commonwealth Governments.

The GVISP developed a work plan for 2002-2004 that focused on securing funding for services for the Iraqis and for the Afghans who had begun coming in smaller numbers into the town during this period. By 2004, things in the town were proceeding relatively smooth and the Committee began to lose momentum

To progress with the Shepparton option over Warnambool mentioned above, DIMIA initiated local meetings with COGS, service providers, and the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and Districts as agencies.

The community response was to look for a group who could "manage" the process and be an accepted contact point for DIMIA.

The GVISP roles now were invigilated, revived and expanded to ensure commitment from all concerned the local Federal Member Dr Shaman Stone who was a strong supporter of the pilot agreed to be the interim Chair. Among the Committee's objectives, is included minimizing on the challenges and shortcomings as pointed out, in Settling Sub-Sahara African Refugee Migrants in Rural Victoria, and other publications (Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2005; Migration Action, Vol. XXVII, Number 3).

The Committee met many times and progressively developed criteria to assist in the selection of the ethnic group who would be the pilot. The Committee considered issues such as:

- A linked or unlinked group? The Committee felt that a group with links to an existing group elsewhere in Australia would be more difficult to settle and stay.
- Family size. The Committee preferred a traditional family structure of the two parents, four or less children to assist in locating suitable housing.
- Age. The Committee considered a younger family with predominantly primary school age children. These were assumed to be more successful in coping with the local resources than groups of older ones (teenagers).
- Language. Where at least one family member had some English.
- Employment. The families had reasonable prospects of employment.
- Health. There were no complex medical or other needs.
- Rate of Arrival. A staggered timetable was chosen.

In considering these criteria and the availability of families the Congolese were selected over Liberians, Sierra Leone ones, and Rwandese. The selection process was difficult for many Committee members but ultimately decisions were made thought to give the settlement process the best chance of succeeding.

The Committee established a comprehensive sub committee structure to address the key settlement areas and included a diverse range of people and agencies. The Committees were:

- Accommodation Sub-Committee,
- Local Community Preparation Sub-Committee,
- Health Services Sub-Committee,

- Childcare/Family Support Sub-Committee,
- Education/Training Sub-Committee,
- Interpreting and Translating Sub-Committee, and
- Employment Sub-Committee.

The only predetermined objective was that the pilot involved the successful settlement of ten Congolese families and that it was the responsibility of all involved to work collaboratively to ensure that this happened in the most effective way possible.

The high level of collaboration assisted as the project was very much an evolving process with many lessons being learnt over the journey. This key element of the participants has been translated in the employment placement initiatives a central piece of this paper.

The first two Congolese families arrived in Shepparton on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2005 followed by others at regular intervals getting to eleven families of an average of six persons per each at the time of writing this paper.

Immediately following the first arrivals a Sub-Sahara African Information Day was held at the Goulburn Valley Ovens Institute of Training and Further Education College (GOTAFE). The workshop was sponsored by COGS, Regional Information and Advocacy Council, La Trobe University, Ethnic Council of Shepparton and Districts, Multicultural Education Centre of GOTAFE, and the Australian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma. The attendees from the community, service providers and agencies gained insights into housing, child rearing, health, schooling, and other settlement matters as key challenges confronting the earlier Sub-Sahara Africans living mainly in Metropolitan Melbourne. The great insights tremendously fueled lessons into the pilot project.

## 5. The Shepparton Project

At about the same time as the pilot project commenced a consortium led by Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES) successfully tendered for the provision of IHSS services in the metropolitan and regional Victoria. The local sub contractor of AMES in Shepparton area was named to be the Multicultural Education Centre of GOTAFE. This agency had to quickly educate the service providers on the new contractual arrangements. However, some confusion remained in respect of the role of the Steering Committee and the IHSS provider.

It was unfortunate that the pilot commenced before DIMIA had introduced their country of origin profiles as these now provide an excellent introduction to the background of the various entrant groups. Some information was gleaned from other sources about the nature of the lifestyle endured by the Congolese in the refugee camps in transit countries namely Tanzania and Uganda.

The Committee and service providers were anxious to know a lot of information about the Congolese in order to better plan and deliver services. Needed information included:

- The situation in Congo, why they left and the conditions in the camps,
- Health information about the diseases and conditions common to the group cohort, and in the refugee community and the treatment they may have received,
- Specific information about their diets,
- Languages spoken so that preparations could be made well in advance for appropriate interpreters (where possible);
- Religious affiliation and the appropriateness of involving Church representatives,
- Level of familiarity with modern technology;
- The Congolese's expectations, what they could consider to be taboo areas and their knowledge of Australia and Australian life, and
- Other informations.

The Committee wished to know about the Congolese and also recognized that service providers and others needed to acquire some basic knowledge about working with refugees and the skills that accompany the duties and responsibilities.

The immediate settling process was an intensive period for the families; IHSS service provider and all of the involved agencies. Typically the process was characterized by:

- A bus that met families at Melbourne airport with food and warm clothing,
- The families were taken to leased homes in Shepparton furnished with the IHSS household formation packaged items,
- On occasions the local media was on hand to meet the new arrivals, thus such receiving widespread coverage in the local press,

- On arrival in Shepparton they were registered with Medicare and Centrelink, linked to medical services, enrolled in schools and if necessary provided with clothes and additional household goods and given an orientation,
- Initially phone cards were provided but it was more effective to arrange pre paid mobiles,
- Provision of food until Centrelink payments could be processed and they had available cash. Many anonymous contributions of cash and goods came from the community,
- Encouragement of local shops to stock maize floor (*wunga*), goat meat, and catfish, and other rare food stuffs as key important staples in the Congolese diet,
- An intensive period to familiarize the Congolese with all aspects of life in Shepparton to facilitate their "independence" including language training,
- Arrangement of medical attention where required often necessitating Melbourne travel, and
- Placement of community volunteers to assist each family with issues such as shopping, public transport, keeping appointments, etc.

Planning for schooling had focused on the state system but on the eve of the first arrivals, it was discovered that the families would be almost exclusively Catholic and very active participants in their faith. Therefore, Mgr Peter Jeffrey, Chair of the Shepparton Interfaith Council offered then un-occupied church house to accommodate one of the first two families. Later, this action was followed by St Brendan's Parish Council and St Brendan's Primary and Notre Dame Secondary College responding to the arrivals' needs by having:

- Each Congolese student receiving one year's free tuition, with fees being introduced incrementally thereafter;
- Each Congolese child received a uniform, books, stationery, a lunchbox and a drink bottle;
- A position of Congolese teacher's aid (a position filled by one of the entrants who has had some teaching background and reasonable English skills). Also emphasized is that in addition to the regular support duties performed in the classrooms, the teacher's aid would be responsible for:
  - Ensuring that there is someone to walk the newest arrivals to school for the first 10 weeks;
  - Making charts that the families can use to help them know which uniform the child is expected to wear on particular days (e.g. regular or sport);
- Established a parents' committee responsible for sourcing uniforms and books for each new arrival and linking three or four sets of parents to each new entrant family;
- Provided an interpreter one day per week to translate all relevant material for parents and to interpret for parent-teacher interviews,
- Arranged a pastoral care worker to deliver programs tailored to meet the needs of the Congolese students,
- Subsidized the Congolese children's participation in excursion, camps and other activities,
- In corroboration with the schools' functionalisms, establish a school holiday program to familiarize the new arrivals with the school environment and prepare them for the start of the school year,
- Ensured that the Congolese children had the opportunity to participate in organized activities at least twice a week,

- Organized bikes and ensured road safety training, and
- Actively involved the Congolese children and their parents in school activities.

Withstanding the ongoing funding challenges for the parish and schools the said endeavours have been a significant success contributing factors to the Congolese settlement in Shepparton. It is of concern whether other recent migrant groups such as the Iraqis and Afghans are very aware of the generosity of the community towards the Congolese, in contrast to their own general treatment. The concern is in relation to the principles of access and equity given the above described community responses.

All of the Steering Committee sub Committees have been quite active throughout the project's life. However, some have been more effective than others in terms of their outcomes. These may include: health, employment, education, and accommodation.

As this paper focuses on community employment initiatives, discussions are directed to the Employment Subcommittee and assess the outcomes. The Employment sub-committee has been meeting monthly and has developed work plans based on a view that participation in the workforce is important in the settlement process.

In innovative and creative ways, the sub committee allocated two families to each to the five Job Network providers and actively engaged the providers to be part of the process, which in time they have embraced the process as a good working model. The following discussion analyses and assesses community employment initiatives through the work of the Employment Sub-committee.

## **6. Community Driven Employment Initiatives**

In appraising what has been done to help the Congolese into employment, initial focus is placed on certain general characteristics of the cohort. This will be followed by the broad aim and structure of the Employment Sub-Committee, how it developed and operated, its challenges and how such was managed, assess what has been done pointing to results and lessons, and finally present the way forward and broad lessons for community employment initiatives. The Employment sub-committee shouldered the role finding and supporting employment initiatives of Congolese as part of the main Steering Committee's role.

### **6.1 Engendering Characteristics of the Shepparton Congolese to Employment**

The first two families who initially arrived, one had more English and presentation skills than the other (note generally the household heads did not have zero English). This provided enormous relief in the facilitation of communication even to the subsequent arrivals. Therefore interpreting and translating, being teacher's aid; these roles and circumstances geared the first arrivals towards some employment engagements. Nevertheless, time had to be allowed for the development of further English language skills at the GOTAFE as part of AMEP and IHSS programs. Also, there were a number of other initial settlement needs requiring addressing before heading for different forms of employment. This implies that they were not job ready for at least the first six or so months but they exposed reasonable potentials.

The background of each family's refugee transitions also provided variation in the coping styles. The families mainly came from Tanzania and Uganda where the latter did not have designated refugee camps, as did the

former. While all the Shepparton Congolese refugees speak Swahili as a general language, those from Uganda reflected higher propensities of coping with and learning English than the other group. This is understandable because the ones from Uganda lived within a broad English speaking community not in a restricted refugee camp. In Uganda, English is used as the *lingua franca*.

As Shepparton is in close proximity with Melbourne, contacts with other Francophone and Lusophone African-Australian communities (i.e. Congolese and Angola people), has provided comparisons and lessons. This has highlighted that the Shepparton Congolese are enjoying greater benefits in a short time of arrival than the Melbourne ones who had been in the country; say over 5 years. The differences mainly arising from the extent of the local community network support provided and the arrivals' responses. The entrants themselves have shown great resilience and openness in a number of respects (positive attitude). Note that Ryan, & Deci 2000 observe that human beings can be pro-active and engaged or alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. Thus, perception of having more advantages than their Melbourne counterparts, not only has enhanced the arrivals' positive attitudes, psychological comfort, new aspirations but also a feeling of reciprocity to the host community.

In addition, coming from a crisis and impoverished background, this has brought about realization of their luck and opportunities; a point reflected by comments like "as soon as we settle well, it would be good to sponsor some of our relatives to join us here in Australia". They had been advised that no sponsorship would be entertained if one lived on Centrelink payments. In a country place like Shepparton, personal transport (own car) is generally an essential input to the quality of life, not only to provide mobility for family shopping, access to work, but also as facilitation to easier living. As well, it is a status symbol in society. Knowing that fork-lift driving jobs were available in the Goulburn Valley, it encouraged a majority of the household men to go for driving lesson, an action that has led to car and fork-lift driving licenses. This outcome and financial availability has brought about a personal fulfillment of car ownership at a later stage.

In regard to some of the presage values migrants bring with them, the Congolese in Shepparton are principally Christians, thus joining the dominant mainstream groups. With the leadership of the Catholic Church as the Chair of the Shepparton Interfaith Council, substantial drive has been provided to the household heads of the first two initial families to work as teacher aids in the Catholic Education schools both at St. Brendan's and St. Mels.

Also, participation in the multi-cultural community events has exposed further potentials (social capital) of the new migrants, which include: performing art (dance), grooming, and personal care. This has led the Shepparton Chamber of Commerce, and other support agencies like Cutting Edge/Uniting Care to incubate an idea of developing a local African Beauty Salon/Food Store to be run by currently un-employed Congolese women. Similar talks are about developing a Shepparton Congolese Performing Arts Group that will mainly involve the women and youth.

Lastly, the idea of betterment of their lives, provisions for the family (food, clothing, and other requirements) and school fees as the children have been enrolled in the Catholic Private Schools; all these have been among the driving forces to employment. These initiatives have seen Shepparton Congolese household heads or mature youth get into employment relatively much quicker than their counterparts. As I am writing this, hardly two years in town (20<sup>th</sup> October 2005 -27<sup>th</sup> March 2007), nine out of the eleven families, each has one or two persons employed.

While the foregoing has discussed the Congolese characteristics that have facilitated their employment, the following were the initial hindrances to being job ready soon after arrival. These included development of reasonable Australian working English and basic understanding of work ethics/practices, transport/car licences to be able drive to work, support to wife whilst husband at work, understanding how the system works between

Centrelink payments, and paid employment given their large family size. Understanding how the tax system works, also contributed to some delay. The following discussions reflect how the community initiatives brought about the above-mentioned success. This is better understood after appreciating the aim and structure of the sub-committee.

## **6.2 Aim and Structure of the Employment Sub-Committee**

The Employment sub-committee aimed at orienting the arrivals (then proposed ten families) into employment in the local firms but in an un-precedented partnership of the job network firms not done before. The local agencies put together by Centrelink included: Job Network Agencies, (e.g. The Salvation Army- Employment Plus, WorkTrainers, and Workways), Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Associations, Private Training Authority (CVGT), Community Representative, and others.

Before the arrivals of any of the Congolese families, participants in this sub-committee brain-stormed; seeking pathways of how and what to be done as the region was receiving the type/cohort of migrants for first time (the Committee Minutes of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2005).

The sub-committee sought to understand issues impacting on Horn of Africa new arrivals (Melbourne experiences). In this regard, one of the writer of this paper (i.e. Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe) being one of the experts on settlement issues of Sub-Sahara Africans in Victoria; was invited to address the sub-committee, and employment issues featured prominently in the talk. About the beginning, the sub-committee assumed adopting 'an early engagement and participation strategy', where the new comers would be introduced to vast and varied employment opportunities and employers so as to acclimatize them to the environment. Early in the process the sub-committee started to thinking about how to develop mentoring programs relevant to the various available jobs in the fruit growing industry, develop skills to manage new and diverse cultures for the benefit of both employers and employees, work out recording and monitoring strategies. Among other objectives, these strategies would be for capturing the learning opportunities from the project. For these and other objectives, each family was assigned to an agency to work with and develop detailed profiles that would be reviewed in the subsequent meeting(s); as well such would be used in linking the individual's characteristics to the available job(s) (Linking the individuals' characteristics to the specific job requirements –Human Resource Specification).

The developments in this Employment Sub-committee were complementary to the work of the other sub-committees e.g. accommodation, Local Community Preparation, Health Services, Childcare/Family support, Education/Training, Interpreting and Translating, and other community set initiatives. All key outcomes would be shared at the Steering Committee Project level, broadly aimed at serving the needs of the host and the arriving communities.

Among the initial problems identified was the absence of consultation with the arriving members of the community as they were not in Australia. The discussion on the development and operation of the employment sub-committee highlights how the lessons were captured.

### **6.3 Development and operation of the Employment Sub-Committee**

The Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot Project, among others it influenced the job network agencies to work differently, and re-directed a better attention and focus to the needs of the client in a way not done before. Although the above agencies (that made up the sub-committee) had been involved in job search and link for job seekers, training, and consultancy as their usual business, they hardly came together to discuss the sharing of clients. They would generally compete except on joint functional matters and submission to policy initiatives.

This time for the Congolese Pilot Project, the main agencies objective was to propagate complementary effort and orient the employable members of the 10 families into employment. The five major job network agencies in Shapparton agreed that each would service two families in the order of the prospective employees becoming job ready. While this would spread the intensity of work among the agencies, each would be exposed to a new cultural nature of the clients. It brought about a new form of partnership and learning across the agencies including reduction in competition, and more focus on the deeply varying customer needs. For the youth within the newly arrived families, schools and their mates there helped to find jobs in the fast food industry. Parents and teachers to the youngsters who worked with the Congolese youth encouraged their own children to support and mentor their newly arrived with whom they shared jobs (Strong community support). The respective family employment agency would provide coaching based on the expectation of the fast food industry. In this regard, these Congolese youth in the fast food jobs (e.g. KFC) received support from their mates, parents, teachers, and the employment agency, all aimed at ensuring that the arrival does the job properly. In a sense, this kind of community support, does not only point to the "Diversity Management Strategies" adopted in this pilot project, it also highlights the management of the challenges into employment. For example, how to deal induction training to these culturally diverse individuals some with limited English skills and different work experience.

### **6.4 Management of the Challenges into Employment**

While the first two families were complete families of husband and wife and siblings as earlier community interests specified, family three and four turned out to be different structure of either a single parent or having brothers to the main household person. These, together with the varying levels of English posed the first challenge as it became difficult to start placing the household heads into employment, leaving no support to the other members of the family (children). Issues in regard to some family members left behind (in un-known locations in refugee camps in Africa) who have had to be traced and tracked down, this has up-set the initiatives to respective families' preparation for employment.

Another challenge was about communities diminishing interests. Though there was much community interest at start, eventually it fluctuated with some employers following suit.

Also, there were varying employment entry requirements with some employers providing structured and mentoring induction training for a reasonable period, yet others had different ideas. Some used a buddy style where fellow workers developed bonds, thus supporting facilitation into employment. Varying expectation of the arrivals with the employers, these played a challenging role.

The question of when one is expected to be at work versus time keeping for various responsibilities, these have been among the challenges. In contrast to the foregoing, when reasonable importance started to be placed on the job, this would out-weigh the more required attention to the family members' needs. For example, a child got sick; the parent could not seek time off work for fear of upsetting the boss. The key question then lingering in the mind of

the Congolese was “what takes precedent, the child’s sickness or the work requirements?). In Australia, work is secondary family is primary. This is part of the education to be imparted, in regard to work environment in Australia.

With the matters discussed in above paragraphs, it could be argued that individual attitude, willingness to work, and appropriate response to the mitigated initiatives; these factors have driven the Congolese into employment within their short time of arrival. The community network support was seen as a major contributor in most of the cases.

Transport to and from work became a major issue, to an extent of the community finding a car to serve the Congolese community before means to individual cars ownership would be attained. Running and management of the car became a big problem. No individuals among the proposed users would be willing to shoulder the responsibilities of looking after the car.

Also, it was a challenge to link child care times and work requirements in mutually a matching approach. There were a few teasing issues on how to fit into the job/work time and child care timing, and such was being taught or transmitted to the new learners.

Some legal aspects were a big challenge, for example those involving Occupational Health and Safety requirements, confidentiality, and fulfilling reciprocal requirements in employment contracts (i.e. as governed by the contract of employment). In addition, matters to do with when to have open discussion, including what information should be shared by the agencies about the families being assisted in complementarities were as well challenges. The question of long and short employment opportunities later started to surface, with agencies asking them-selves what they might do for their respective clients in the regards.

In order to create joint approaches to addressing many of the above challenges; a day workshop was organized by CVGT for the sub-committee participants. These efforts have resulted in having one or two members of the nine families out of eleven families now in employment in Shepparton.

## **7. Lessons and the Way Forward on Community Employment Initiatives**

The initiatives of the sub-committee as managed by the local Centrelink and conducted in partnership with employment agencies or Job Networks, as precipitated by community support networks; it has given the new arrival to enter employment relatively in a quicker way compared to other refugees that in the past have settled in big metropolitan cities.

The key lesson in this approach is the community ownership and involvement in the process right from start. It has allowed openness, support, and correction of mistakes with minimum disruptions. Community connection and networks linked well by relatively a focused agenda, it has geared acceptability of a group that has come to Shepparton completely disconnected or un-linked entrants. In this regard, even the refugees who arrived a little before the Congolese (i.e. the Iraqis) have participated in supporting the new arrivals to settle well in Shepparton, despite a different reception accorded.

Facilitation, provision of initial non-dependence aid, and a bit of hand holding at start, these strategies have seen entrants gaining confidence. The first provides entry and paves a way for further other jobs especially as qualification recognition is a long process. Always, it is challenging to be able to translate the previous roles in the countries of origin into the equivalents in the new country even if certificates are available.

Commitment to support such arrivals for reasonable time is critical, and these need to be characterized by reasonable knowledge of the issues and the individuals' circumstances say exposed knowledge, skills, and abilities and allowing for flexibility.

Family structure and circumstances is noted as major hindrance to employment opportunities. Any training for the new arrivals should be to encourage long term residency in the rural/regional area, then induction and orientation training should be done there.

A nature of a joint task, (say in the case of this project), it has created new levels of co-operation that has grown out of the employment agencies, and community networks as well building more trust between them. There is a shift in the way they work. New relationships have emerged in the service provision in the Goulburn Valley, for example the working of Real Estate and other service providers.

A movement from informal to formal processes of acknowledgement of language provision, like getting some of the Congolese to be prepared to work as interpreters of Swahili in the Goulburn Valley.

Media is an excellent tool in transforming community minds as long as it transmits the positive and success stories. Some of the lessons would be reflected in the conclusion and recommendations.

## 8. Conclusions

As Lo Cheung-on, (1979) argues society's re-action to the new comers is relocated in the preceding incidents of the same society, thus Shepparton environment and the nature of the rural multicultural, multi-faith, and multi-lingua society, it has had long experience of receiving long and short term residents. The pull factors have been rotating around irrigated agriculture and the related industries. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the region has been receiving diverse groups, for example the first arrivals included, Anglican Irish and Catholic Iris, later years received Dutch, Germanys, Greeks, Italians, and other South Europeans. As time has gone by the region received the Albanians, Turkish, Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, Middle East persons (Iraqis and Kuwait), Asians (Indians, Afghans, Chinese), and Africans (Congolese, Sudanese, Somalis, Kenyans, Ugandans, Egyptians, Nigerians, Ghanaians, South Africans, Zimbabweans,) and others.

The local conditions and circumstances have played a key role in welcoming and helping the arrivals to settle. It not clear whether the local conditions could be duplicated else-where to the extent of translating the success factors to another rural region. For example, the community spirit of welcoming the others who are different, for whom support networks developed to help in the settlement process. This may not be easily translatable as it has been nurtured for quite a long time based on the specific circumstances un-like the other rural towns. Also, the good supply of short term farm labour based on irrigated agriculture, it has not only sponsored migration to the area also provided growth in services supporting the growing population.

The Management of diversity as a way of settling migrants and their families presents challenges for new arrivals and to the wider communities. Therefore, preparation of the community is vital. As much as possible the process should be organic with certain key community leaders providing the leadership. In order to ensure that migrants are able to successfully settle in rural Australia, settlement plans should be geared to common goals for the settlers and employers. This strategy initiates having a common purpose that could precipitate jointly solving the challenges. In this way, the regional communities could be able to capitalize on the possible joint contributions of the migrants and facilitate settlement and integration.

Induction training is very important part to entry into employment. Migrants need serious and well extended support in job search processes, entry, and induction orientations; irrespective of the means of arrival in Australia. New arrivals require adequate settlement services upon arrival as the first impression matters a lot. New arrival need to engage with their new community including the ethno-specific groups so as to build a positive attitude for being accepted.

A feel of being valued, acknowledged and respected is vital in settlement and employment. This point has motivated the Congolese and made them start feeling reciprocating to the community needs. Therefore, respecting ones beliefs, culture, dietary requirements, and other virtues; these have made Congolese in Shepparton feel more privileged and lucky than those in Melbourne, a situation likely to influence their stay rather in later years moving to bigger cities. The idea of developing the performing arts group, and African glooming saloon, and a food store and all those aspects of cultural promotion and sharing, all these will go a long way to support not only income generating entities, but sustaining certain cultural norms.

Whatever has been done by the employment sub-committee has been geared towards retention, encouraging receptability of the first available jobs and used the same for development into other areas.

The working of the sub-committee brought about new dimension in the working and operation of job network and training agencies where more co-operation than competition have been fostered. It is turning out to be their new

modes operand. Shifts in the working relationships have occurred including linking accommodation needs to employment needs. For example, there is a better understanding of real estate and the support agencies say to the Congolese.

## 9. Recommendations

A number of learning's critical to settlement and employment success have emerged as a result of the Shepparton Congolese project. It is recognized that a vital empathetic understanding be developed given the circumstances of the parties involved in the employment situation where practical responses need to be invoked. This should come with the commitment of the employer to support the efforts and in a flexible manner, without putting down the learner for the initial lack of knowledge (Confidence Building).

Although community support, network connection were premised on openness, reciprocity, and readiness to work; however facilitation is always required and there is a need of "hand holding" at the start until one gains comfort but within a reasonable time. For Refugee and Humanitarian entrants, their first job in Australia (employment) tends to open all the other future employment opportunities. It is strongly suggested that serious attention be paid to this part with special support through community initiatives that are well targeted and standardized and do not result in dependence.

Broad mentoring programs are encouraged to take place with assisted transitions, and structured training programs commencing at the same time for all and include support and jointly developed remedial strategies. Job Network and local employers continue to make contacts and improve links with partners who have employment vacancies and organize training opportunities for the target groups.

The success factors critical to the success of the Shepparton project and the transition into employment included:

- The host community was consulted on the settlement proposal and was involved in establishing selection criteria for the ethnic arrival group.
- The establishment of a steering committee with broad representation to oversight the project and to coordinate the work of sub committees
- Substantial preparatory work to prepare the host community for the refugee arrivals
- The involvement of service provider agencies in the planning and communication processes.
- The identification of suitable and available employment opportunities and the recruitment of prospective employers.
- Identification and assessment of the arrivals employment skills and linkages to appropriate training and support established.
- Settlement services focused on building confidence and engaging the arrivals with the host community.
- Promotion of culture through art, dance, music and performance was encouraged to build a sense of value and respect.
- The transition to employment was linked to settlement and support services through an environment of education, mentoring and training.

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