

**Horn-Afrik Employment,  
Training and Advocacy project**

**The Achievements and Challenges of the Project**  
**2007-2010**



## **Acknowledgments**

This report covers the achievement and the experience of the Horn of Afrik Employment, Training and Advocacy project over the last three years from 2007 to 2010. The project has been funded by RE. Ross Trust and on behalf of all the members of the project, I would like to point out how grateful we are about the funding that RE. Ross Trust has provided this project. I have to admit that that all the achievements that the project has made would not be possible without Ross Trust's generous financial support.

I would like to thank the Carlton Local Agency Network (CLAN) that initially created the concept of the Horn of Africa project. Thanks also to the community and all the CLAN members who were participants on the Steering Committee; including Idris Nafisa, Farah Jama, Ibrihim Abdi, Yassan Abi, Abdi Fatah, Ibrahim Saed, Rebecca Harris (CCPS), Collette Bacash (New Hope Foundation), Greg Woolford (SFYS), Mary Parfrey (CNLC), Nick Parissis (VPD), Helen Collins (LLEN), Jai Marchington (YMCA), Max Broadway (EML) and David Godden (NYCH).

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I extend my thanks to all members of the project whom without their ongoing participation and cooperation the project would not succeed.

Before, I conclude I have to acknowledge that support of the member for Melbourne Mr. Lindsay Tanner, the Federal Minister of Finance and Deregulation, and his staff. Without Lindsay Tanner's unconditional support, the project would not have achieved what it has over the last three years. The Honourable Mr. Tanner has supported us in the areas of training and employment and he also highlighted the plight of the all African-Australian professionals. We wish Lindsay Tanner, who is now retiring from Federal politics, all the best and good luck in his future.

Omar M. Farah  
Project officer

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## Introduction

This report focuses primarily on the Horn of African (HoA) migrants and their experience in the Australian employment sector. Most of the said migrants were refugees and the majority of them started to resettle in Australia from the 1990s. These Horn of Africa migrants had experienced wars and civil conflict, and before their arrival in Australia, they had lived in a second or third country. Most of them left their countries of birth involuntarily. A sizable number of this group has made their home in Carlton, Melbourne. In this group, many of them were qualified and had overseas qualifications or later obtained a local degree. The local service providers, through the Carlton Local Agency Network, felt that many men in the area were not accessing the local services and required more attention in order to understand their needs. As a result of this concern, a research which was conducted middle of 2006 focusing on the men and their needs and perceptions. Among other issues, the research has demonstrated that employment was the main pressing issue for the men. For the community to be viable and successful, the local

### Figure 1

*Horn of African countries consists of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan. Eritrea joined this group as an independent State in 1993 after it separated from Ethiopia. These countries including Eritrea are situated along the red sea, a strategically important region as most international Maritimes pass from the south to the north and vice versa. In the 1990's, after years of dictatorial regimes, they all fall apart one by one; but the magnitude of how hard they fell differs from country to country. The social and economic failure of Horn of African countries coincides with the end of the Cold war when they lost all the financial, military, and political support that Horn of African dictators were getting from the world's superpowers. Unfortunately or fortunately (depending on who you ask) when the Cold war ended, the dictators were advised by their masters to change and become democratic, respect human rights, allow differing political parties and show some kind of transparency about their day-to-day work practice. These new instructions were an alien concept to the Horn of African dictators and it was difficult for them to implement and adopt the new concept very quickly. As a result, these countries became the major refugee exporters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and some of their refugees ended up on the Australian shores.*

service providers were certain that they should have employment opportunities which open many other options. This reality has led to the establishment of the CLAN directed Horn-Afrik Employment and Training project to specifically deal with the Employment issues of the Horn of African members in Carlton.

In mid 2007, Horn-Afrik Employment, Training and Advocacy project brochures were launched. As was already explained, the project was aimed at helping the unemployed members of Horn of African communities in Carlton and its surrounding neighbourhood. Horns of African countries consist of Eritrea<sup>1</sup>, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan. The project was funded by RE Ross Trust, a philanthropic foundation, and the funding was designed to run a period of three years. As the name clearly indicates the project's focuses were employment, training and for the advocacy of the community on various issues. The community's employment and training needs were identified earlier by research conducted by Omar Farah, and funded by Carlton Local Agencies Network under the auspices of Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre Inc. The project's responsibility was to explore ways and means to secure jobs and training for its members. The targeted members were relatively qualified migrants from Horn of Africa who were having difficulties in finding employment through the normal process. The Horn of African immigrants happened to be the first<sup>2</sup> wave of African origin that began to reside permanently in Australia in 1990s after the end of the Cold war. Because of their newness in Australia many people, who are unfamiliar with African people, mistakenly assume that there are cultural similarities between the Africans and Aborigines. Others had assumed that they have similar culture to Arabs since they share the same religion, Islam. In fact, none of these assumptions are true.

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<sup>1</sup> Eritrea become independent in 1993 and had not shared with the Horn of African countries the history we have discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> A PhD student from La Trobe, Mr. Issa Farah, who extensively researched the Somali Diaspora, has found that the first Somalian born people had arrived in Australia in 1898. Their point of arrival and the ship that brought them have been identified but no record after their arrival is available.

The aim of the Project has been to overcome the current impediment to these African men finding meaningful employment and attempt to educate the employers to learn about the Horn of African qualified applicants.

This report will explain to the stake holders, the clients and the public in general about the employment problems of the Horn of African migrants. It will also explain how the Project has advocated vigorously for the members to achieve its goals. Additionally, the report will discuss how a local politician, the Honourable Lindsay Tanner, Federal Minister for Finance and Deregulation, has endeavoured to support the African professionals after members of the project approached and appealed to him for help. Furthermore, it will discuss how the subsequent appeal by the Minister was responded to by many firms, service providers, and community leaders to support the project on varying levels. The report will comment on how the focus has changed from Horn of Africans to Pan-Africans. The report will also examine briefly how the project has been impacted by the Global Economic Crunch, and the Australian media's attitude in magnifying the trivial shortcomings of few members of the African communities without considering their new resettlement process. The overall success of the project, and finally the challenges that the project has experienced will be carefully analysed.

## The unemployment problems of the Horn of African migrants

It is a matter of fact that successive Australian governments have opened their gates to African refugees, and that has been very helpful and deserves gratitude. However the doors within the gates remain closed, especially in the employment sector. The unemployment rates of all Africans with refugee backgrounds are the highest in the nation. Additionally, there are overseas and local graduates in different disciplines who are driving taxis, or doing other menial jobs. This issue is not only impacting current job seekers, but also young Africans who sometimes opt to make a quick exit from the education system and join their parent in these jobs. The young Africans make this decision having concluded that this is the only available option for them, regardless of their educational achievement. As clearly pointed out by Hailuel's report 'Integration Strategies of Migrants and Refugees' (Hailuel Gebre-selassie, 2008), there are un-

dismantled social barriers in Australia. The report has explained that many<sup>3</sup> Australian researchers have confirmed that racism and discrimination against black African-Australians prevent them from successfully accessing employment. To make the matter more difficult the Australian media has a history of continuously criticizing the African-Australian community collectively whenever one African-Australian migrant makes mistake. The

media exaggerate, magnify and catastrophize the simplest cases and some

### **Figure 2**

*The national census of 2006 has shown that the Horn of African (HOA) unemployment rate was much higher than the national level. Immigrants from Sudan had the highest unemployment rate\* standing 38.2%. Somali born immigrants have seconded (32.2%), followed by Eritrean born rates (19.9%), and by Ethiopian born (17.0%). Around this time, from 2006 to 2008, the nation's rate of unemployment was from 3.5 to 4 percent. This data also indicates that the more unemployment is high within a particular ethnic group; the more all the other social development indicators are low such as the acquisition of higher education and home ownership.*

*\*This calculation is the percentage of the total persons in the labour force.*

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission report (2010) and Murdoch University report (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007) have both confirmed this reality.

politicians have jumped in on the media's bandwagon without carefully considering the matter. One may argue that there is a 'guest mentality'; that Africans are expected to behave like guests. Normally, a guest who has been sheltered, fed and given safety is expected to behave well and be grateful. In fact African migrants are not guests, they should be considered as members of the household who are as likely to partake in the same anti-social conduct that any member of our society can be capable of. When someone is accused of terrorism related charges; this is inarguably a serious crime; however the media should say 'person so and so has been charged of that crime' without referring to the ethnicity and incriminating the community collectively. Each one of us belongs to a specific ethnic group, and then we together form one nation – Australia. It is unfortunate that when it comes to criminal profiling it only seems to apply to the new Australians.

Interestingly, the 2006 Australian census<sup>4</sup> has shown that the question of ancestry of the Horn of African community indicates that 20 percent of HoA community members are born in Australia, not in Africa (see figure 3). On the other side of the coin, some HoA migrants are opting, as an alternative, to run their own businesses in the suburbs of Melbourne. Many shops, that sell a mix of HoA and European dress, as well as restaurants with different varieties of food, are now opened in Footscray, Heidelberg, Ascot Vale and Flemington.

**Figure 3**

*According to the Australian Census in 2006, twenty percent of the Horn of African Community was born in Australia not in Africa. These data shows that 28.7% of the Somali ethnic was born in Australia followed by Ethiopia 21.1%, Eritrea 20.5%, and Sudan (the most recent arrivals) 8%. This is a clear indication that these people are Australian in every sense of the word, and Australian government has to accept fully the responsibility of what may happen to them in long term. This responsibility extends in the areas of social and economic development, and specifically their attitude towards the rule of law.*

This group of entrepreneurs did not only create employment opportunities for themselves but they are employing many other Australians. This practice of

<sup>4</sup> VMC website

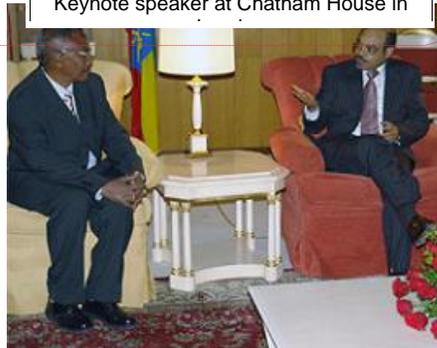
successfully securing jobs in different countries with their professions has been implemented internationally by all cultures. For example Australian university graduates, who could not get jobs in Australia, are now working for NASA (America's National Astronomy Space Agency); both in Federal and State Somali Governments, and holding positions ranging from director generals, Ministerial positions, and President (State Premier in the Australian standard). Furthermore, other Australian graduates are recruited by foreign universities and UN Organizations in all over the world. Some of these people could only work as taxi drivers in Australia to survive, despite their qualifications.

In contrast to their titles in Australia, today, these graduates are not only fully employed but their competence has been internationally recognized. For example, the current president of Puntland State of Somalia Dr. Abdirahman Faroole, a former La Trobe University PhD candidate, has been welcomed warmly in world capitals from Addis Ababa, Washington to London as an international prominent figure (See figures 4 and 5). It is a fact that

many Australian born experts are working in overseas competitively, but it is not common that some ethnic groups can only prove their knowledge and skills only if they leave Australia and travel to overseas. Unfortunately, a person's assessment of this circumstance may help him/her to conclude that his/her future doesn't lie in Australia. Definitely, this kind of conclusion will not help either side of the equation.



**Figure 4**  
President Faroole  
Keynote speaker at Chatham House in



**Figure 5**  
Prime Minister of Ethiopian Republic  
Zenawi and President Faroole of Puntland  
State in Addis Ababa

Commented [M1]: Insert info on Dr. Faroole- check with Omar

### **Advocating vigorously for the project's clientele to find employment**

The Project planned to register and collect all the necessary details of those who are looking for work, as recommended by the committee that oversee the Project. The primary goal was to advocate and closely work with those who live in Carlton and its surrounding Neighbourhood. In the later stages, many HoA job seekers, from distant suburbs, requested to be registered and join the project, stating that there are no similar supportive employment projects in their neighbourhood. Consequently, the list of the members increased especially when the project had secured jobs and government funded training that became useful. However, it was difficult to collect the data and the project officer, as a result, had to negotiate with the prospective members about what type of personal details should be taken. Some people were reluctant to provide their personal details regardless of the degree of their employment needs. The reason behind their reluctance was that they were not quite sure how their personal details will be treated despite some assurance. But others were determined to provide all the details that may help an employer to understand the education and employment history of the applicant, as well as the area that the jobseeker lives in geographically.

In Victoria, there are a number of methods that a jobseeker can use to find employment. These methods can include; an individual level, to be represented and advocated for by an authorized agency. An individual may register himself or herself with government funded employment agencies or non-profit organizations to find adequate jobs and training. Additionally a job seeker could visit employment specialized websites such as Seek ([www.seek.com.au](http://www.seek.com.au)), Jobsearch ([www.jobsearch.com.au](http://www.jobsearch.com.au)), Career ([www.career.com.au](http://www.career.com.au)), infoxchange ([www.infoxchange.org.au](http://www.infoxchange.org.au)) and many other private or public websites that also

post available vacancies. A common informal way is to monitor the local newspapers to check the advertised jobs both from private and public institutions.

The Government funded employment agencies have some inside knowledge that allows them to access the available jobs from different sources in an early stage. Similarly, they have some legal authority and mandate to advocate and represent their clients. Their clients are required by Centrelink to abide by certain conditions in order to be eligible for Centrelink payment. Therefore, these agencies have some kind of clout or leverage to manage the job seekers, and make them respond to their instruction readily as mandated by Centrelink. Also, the Employment Agencies have funding available for them to organize free training courses that can be offered by accredited organizations to eligible members. Employment Agencies provide financial support and other incentives. For example they may purchase uniforms or pay travel expenses and give jobseekers advice about how to handle interviews.

There are also informal ways that a jobseeker can find employment. This happens when a member of an immediate family, close relative or friend provides support for a job, or an alert of a vacancy without going through the formal channels. This kind of opportunity emerges, for example, when a manager communicates with another manager to check if there is a possibility to allocate 'John junior' who is a new graduate. This type of support is very common in Australia and it is readily available for those who have contacts. This type of networking is not available to the HoA men who lack access to these long-standing channels.

In contrast, the Horn-Afrik Employment and Training Project endeavoured to form a different system for operating; initially its main responsibility was gathering employment opportunity information and advocating. The gathered employment information would then be distributed to the registered members according to their profession. Additionally an employment opportunity may also be forwarded

to the project by colleagues through shared emails. In this instance however there remains a fear that other applicants may already have received the information distributed to the members, as the information was not coming directly from the original sources. This fear comes to the surface when a sizable number of project members received acknowledgement of their application but were never contacted for an interview. Additionally, most of those who manage to apply for the position on time and were called for an interview were advised that they were not successful.

According to many employers, they don't have enough experience to be qualified for the positions as they are new graduates. Others were rejected because their qualifications and their experience were from overseas and may not match the local employer's need. This obstacle nourishes their preconceived concept that Horn of

Figure 6

**Ahmed Warsame**

**Professional Qualifications & Studies**

**Formal Education & Qualifications:**

**Level 3 Certificate of Interpreter & Translator - 2002**

NAATI, Accredited, Australia

**Diploma of Certified Practicing Accountant (CPA) -1996**

ASA - Status, CPA Australia, Australia

**Graduate Diploma in Education, 1994**

The University of Melbourne, Victoria

Teaching Methods in: Business Management, Accounting, Middle School Commerce, Mathematics and Chemistry.

**Master of Business Administration (MBA) 1988**

California State University, USA

Major: Management & Accounting

Thesis Project: Marketing Research.

**Bachelor of Science 1980**

Somali National University, Faculty of Education, Somalia

**Major:** Chemistry, **Minor:** Mathematics

**Further Studies:**

Business Computing

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Victoria

- Australian Taxation Law, RMIT
- Australian Company Law, RMIT
- Australian Business Law, RMIT

**Professional Qualifications and Studies**

- MYOB Course: computerized accounting software with payroll system, Melbourne, Australia
- Management Concepts & Skills, TOT Training, US AID / SOMTAD, Somalia
- Training Design, Presentation & Evaluation, US AID / SOMTAD, Somalia
- Needs Assessment, Data Analysis, Goals & Objectives, US AID / SOMTAD, Somalia

Africans are not getting the jobs because of racially related assessment and the 'otherization' mentality. For example, Mr Ali (see Figure 6), despite relevant academic achievements could not get a job in the field he was trained for and is currently working as a taxi driver for survival. Similarly Mr **Warsame** (See Figure 7) is currently working as a sessional accounting tutor in Victorian University of Technology (VUT) on part time basis, as well as a bilingual translator and Interpreter for different language providers.

**Figure 7**

Consequently many applicants become discouraged to strive to find the jobs that they were trained for. This kind of problem was not widespread but was prevalent. Could the project change this notion or convince the employer to employ the jobseeker? While the project has helped some firms to employ our members, most of them were determined to enumerate a list of draconian justifications as to why they would not employ them. Some of the arguments that keep coming back include:

- He doesn't have local experience
- He did not show confidence during the interview
- We want someone who can stay with us many years to come and we are not quite sure how long this applicant will stay with us
- There are many others who are more qualified than him
- He is a new graduate with no experience
- Human resources are not available to talk to you

**Mohyadin Ali**

**EDUCATION**

**Master of Business Administration (MBA) 2005**

Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

**Master of Arts, Economics (MA) 2000**

University of Bombay, India

**Bachelor of Arts, Economics (BA) 1993**

University of Bombay, India

**On-going professional Development**

Marketing Management Certificate  
Microsoft Office suite software  
Conflict Management, leadership and Community Building  
Human Rights National and Global Perspective

- Human resources will call you back.

Additionally, when attempting to learn the outcome of these interviews, some employers argued that they could not discuss those kinds of issues with anyone without proper authorization, due to privacy issues. Furthermore, some applicants were reluctant to authorize the project's follow up as to why they couldn't get the job. As explained earlier, contrary to what is available for their Australian counterparts, the new Horn of African migrants have no well placed contacts to resort to when things fail to work for them.

When the project attempted to know the jobs that are in the pipeline, most institutions, firms or companies, public or private refer the inquirer (the project officer) to their website to check all employment related information. This work practice limits the project's objective to effectively support the community, with a more proactive approach to ascertaining what jobs might be available.

At this bumpy crossroads, the project opted to find other ways and means to overcome this situation and decided to highlight this issue to the politicians and policy makers to find a way forward.

### **Highlighting the needs of the HoA professionals to the local politicians**

To speed up the project's strategic plan, the project invited the then local member in the opposition, the Honourable Lindsay Tanner to an event intended to launch Horn Afrik's new project promotion brochures. We approached Lindsay Tanner because the project was aimed at people in his electorate. Our aim was to explain to the Minister the problems that Horn of African professionals are encountering in their efforts to find employment, regardless of whether they are graduates from overseas or Australian university graduates. We therefore articulated to him how the community is convinced that there is racially based discrimination in the employment industry. To be fair, in this context we also mentioned the concerns of the job seekers; such as the absence of local experience and knowledge of Australian work culture. Nevertheless, we argued that these concerns should not be used as an excuse to reject the qualified African applicants. Most new graduates, regardless of their background, have no experience and have limited or no knowledge about Australian work culture until they commence the new job. Obviously, it is a bonus for the employer to immediately reap the resources and experience of the new employee; however that should not be used as a fortified fence to keep the African job seeker out. We believe the Minister understood the gravity of the matter and how it is negatively impacting the community in general, as well as the possible future consequence that this alienation may have on them.

Consequently, after the Minister heard our concerns and saw our list (see appendix 1, attached) of the qualified people who are local graduates, and who are unemployed or doing menial jobs such as driving taxis, he agreed to take the issue very seriously. Minister Tanner publicly expressed his disappointment about the high unemployment rate of Africans<sup>5</sup> and called Australian companies to show some responsibility and give fair treatment to African professionals.

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<sup>5</sup> **The Age, 31<sup>st</sup> of July, 2007**

Consequently, after the Minister's speech at the Redmond Barry lecture of the State Library <sup>6</sup> (see also appendix 2), National Australia Bank has initiated a program to provide workplace training to those Africans who have either accounting or business related qualifications.

On 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2008, the minister invited, in the treasury building in Melbourne, a sizable number of representatives from different companies. Minister Tanner and the Horn Afrik project officer Mr. Farah explained briefly but concisely to the group how the African professionals couldn't get jobs in their areas of profession. The Minister has encouraged the representatives to find ways to make the companies more inclusive in their recruitment programs. The minister has not requested a 'free ride' but he suggested to the representatives of the companies to increase their areas of corporate social responsibility.

**Figure 8**

'It is clear that a collaborative approach is required, which builds on the strengths and assets of African Australian communities, promotes their genuine participation, appreciates their different backgrounds and patterns of arrival, respects their diverse cultures and also recognizes, for some, particular vulnerabilities and risks'.  
(Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010)

As a result of Minister Tanner's work, a network comprised of corporate bodies has been created to find ways to support the African job seekers and, at this stage, the focus became to support the African job seekers first to address one of the blockages that presumably keep them off the job – local experience. At this stage limited employment possibilities had been promised or were coming forward.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.financeminister.gov.au/speeches/2008/sp\\_20080730.html](http://www.financeminister.gov.au/speeches/2008/sp_20080730.html)

## **The involvement of firms and service providers to support the Africans**

As a result of the Minister's initiatives many organizations have actively joined the program and offered fully paid work placements to the African professionals- mainly in the IT industry. The companies or organizations that took part in this initiative in one way or other include National Australia Bank, IBM, Australian Unity, and Australia Post. Each of these companies has offered fully paid training programs in their area of specialty and some of them have actually retained a number of people they had trained. For example, National Australia Bank has retained some of the group that they trained and IBM has offered fully paid work placements for three persons in a period of six months.

Jesuit Social Services (JSS), Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES), Victorian University and Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) have also played a supporting role. It is fair to mention that BSL was involved, well before Lindsay Tanner's initiative, in a program that collaborated with ANZ Bank where some migrants with a refugee background were recruited through BSL's 'Given the Chance Program'. JSS and AMES have also played a commendable role to effectively disseminate and distribute the offers from different entities to the African communities. JSS in particular works with the National Australia Bank to liaise between the bank and African professionals about the programs that the Bank wants to offer. In this case, all Africans are invited to apply to the program.

Furthermore, there are two forums<sup>7</sup> where the participants regularly meet and discuss continuously how to improve the African professionals' opportunity and secure more jobs and more training for them. One forum is attended by the representatives of the companies and Service Providers and the other by community leaders/representatives and liaison officers from Lindsay Tanner's

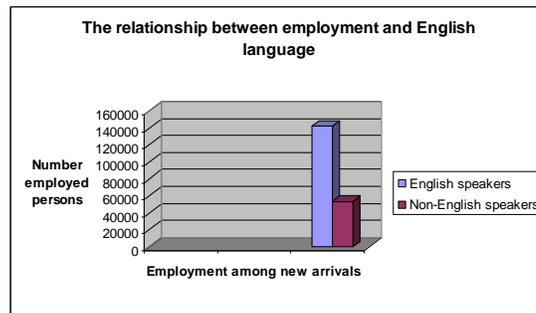
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<sup>7</sup> As a result of Lindsay Tanner's engagement two forums are held regularly. The representatives of the involved companies and service providers gather to discuss how they can participate the program and make suggestions and advices to tackle the issue in question. The other forum is attended by African community representatives (leaders) who raise their concerns and expectations in the program.

office. Even though the actual fruit of the forums has not been fully and effectively harvested yet, it keeps the initiatives alive.

### The changing focus from Horn Africans to Pan-Africans

Even though all Africans, regardless of their country of origin, have difficulties while competing in the labour market, the magnitude of their employment problems differ from country to country depending on many factors. Many non-Horn of African professionals have no refugee background and entered into Australia under normal or skilled migration. These groups have had formal education and strong history of employment prior to their arrival in Australia. They left their country of birth well prepared and voluntarily and were not suffering social or political pressures. Furthermore, their 'lingua franca' is either English or the English language was adopted as a mainstream language in their previous work place or/and education. Therefore, their employment opportunity was higher than those who came from Horn of Africa. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics, in July 2009, the recently arrived overseas born unemployed were totaled 196, 000 persons, and the English speakers were 53,400 (27%) compared to non-English speakers of 142,000 (73%). This data clearly shows that those with strong English language skills are more



**Figure 9**

likely to be employed compared to those with limited English skills (see figure 9).

In contrast, the immigrants from Horn of Africa were forced to leave their countries, and their arrival in Australia has not been premeditated and has been involuntary. Their lingua franca both in prior education and in the workplace was not necessarily English. Most of them were refugees who went through a period of trauma and volatility. Furthermore, many of them were Muslims and

coincidentally arrived in Australia within a few years of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001<sup>8</sup>. All these issues and other matters have in one way or another affected their stand to find the jobs that they want and are qualified for.

Obviously, when any immigrants establish financial independence they would contribute to Australia, achieve skills and integrate into the society more easily. If it is the opposite, the community would remain outside of the Australian social fence and would be called “the others”. Knowing all that the project lobbied with the government, as explained earlier, to specifically support the HoA community. But when many non-Horn of Africans joined these programs, in the name of Africans, the disadvantaged group (the Horn of Africans discussed earlier in this report) are dominated by skilled migrants from other areas of Africa.

Nevertheless, even though the disadvantaged Horn of African applicants may not compete against the other non-Horn of African applicants, definitely the process will have a far-reaching benefit in the long term. In fact employing one competent African applicant, regardless of the applicant’s place of birth, will have a positive effect to the Australian employer in the future. Therefore, in this context, even though the initial intended Horn of African group is not benefiting from the program as much as we anticipated, the overall future benefit for all Africans is positive.

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<sup>8</sup> The day in which the terrorist group Al-Qaeda attacked the [New York](#) twin towers and [Washington](#) Pentagon; it impacted the attitude of the international community towards Muslims.

### **The effects of the Global Economic Crunch**

The financial crisis of 2007–present is a crisis triggered by a liquidity shortfall in the United States banking system. It has resulted in the collapse of large financial institutions, the "bail out" of banks by national governments and downturns in stock markets around the world. In many areas, the housing market has also suffered, resulting in numerous evictions, foreclosures and prolonged vacancies. Australia was not fully immune from this economic contagion; however it suffered mildly compared to the other developed countries. However, many firms have reduced their human resources stock (employees) to go into survival mode. Others have halted employing new employees until they ascertain that Australia is economically out of the woods.

This new problem has strengthened the size and length of the barrier that the Horn of African job seekers were facing over the years. In 2008-2009 the unemployment rate of African migrants increased to 13.5%, compared to 4.3% of the Australian born job seekers. As a result, many have opted to leave the country, while others have accepted to take up whatever jobs become available for them. The program that Lindsay Tanner has initiated created hope and positive expectation. It provided training programs and limited employment, but fell short to provide the more needed long term employment opportunities. This is an impact of the Global Economic Crunch that gained momentum and shook the confidence of Australian companies to employ more people. But all hope was not lost, as employment opportunities are now at a steady at 5.3% as of March, 2010 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This is a good indicative of the Australian employment status but how this will reflect in the African-Australian job prospect remains to be seen.

### **The overall success of the project**

During the tenure of the project, enormous success in many areas was achieved, despite the global economic crunch and other obstacles discussed in previous chapters. These addressed areas include finding jobs for the members, training opportunities, and advocating for their cause as well as providing information sessions to help them to understand their rights and responsibilities in the Australian context.

### **Who were our clients?**

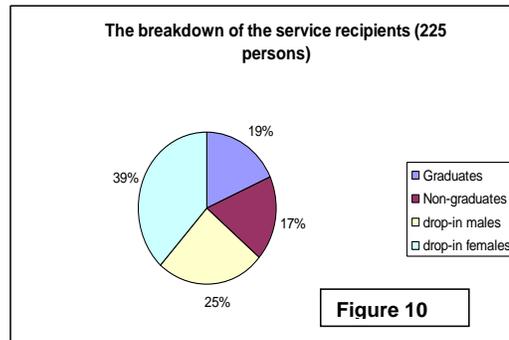
The project provides variety of services to many Carlton residents and others from distant suburbs. The service recipients are divided into those who receive ongoing support and those who receive occasional support.

Those who receive the ongoing support are divided into graduates and non-graduates. The graduated ones are supported by the project on regular basis individually either by providing relevant information or advocating for them in different levels. The non-graduated members receive one to one support that can be either employment or social.

Those who receive the occasional support are those who are not formally registered with the project but have the liberty to walk in into the office and request some kind of help and support. The break down of the groups is as follows:

We provide support 42 graduates who we communicate with constantly to pass information or advice to communicate with a certain particular firm if there are job prospects. Non-graduate totals at the moment 39 persons and some have non-professional skills, such as Truck or Taxi driving.

The occasional support recipient totals 144 (57 men and 87 women). Some of them were supported more than twice from filling forms advocating for them. More than 80% of this group is from Carlton. The Carlton residents who receive our support are 158 or 70.2% of our clients.



to

In total the number of people that the project has supported over the years totals 225 persons **excluding** those who indirectly benefited from the project's lobbying exercise or made calls to the office every now and then to find information. Similarly, those who came into the office for just information and not received a physical support such as going with them to somewhere or filling forms for them or calling for them a particular agency are not included in this report. If someone looks the graph carefully, one may notice that even though the project is aimed to support men only there are high percentages of women who receive support one way or other. Many local families are headed by a woman, who has the responsibility of employment and has to provide for the family.

**Commented [M2] :** Mary comment- how many then?

In total, most of the service recipients are from Carlton however, there is sizable number of people live in other suburbs including Clifton Hill, North Melbourne, Flemington, Hoppers crossing, Heidelberg, Reservoir, Bundora, Preston, Broadmeadows, Footscray, Fitzroy and Ascot Vale.

The project succeeded in highlighting the unemployment problems of the community at **the State** and the Federal level. The project officer has approached personally, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Federal Minister of Finance and Deregulation who later devoted more time to address the HoA

**Commented [M3] :** Mary comment- Who? do we need a paragraph on this?

employment issues both in the media<sup>9</sup> and with employers. Moreover, the President of African Think Tank ([www.att.org.au](http://www.att.org.au)), Dr. Berhan Ahmed<sup>10</sup> and the project officer Omar Farah<sup>11</sup>, have engaged and deployed the media to highlight the issue.

The office of the project also became a hub where anyone who needs help, from interpreting to advocacy, often without appointment. Since the community is an oral society, whatever services that the local resident receives also attract those who live in distant suburbs. The project also ran community meetings, both informally and formally to disseminate information, and was able to listen to the concerns of the local residents and then refer them to the appropriate and relevant services. In relation to the forums, the project was grateful to receive grants from City of Melbourne's Community Support and Ethnic Meal Grants to run these forums, thereby helping the community to meet and discuss relevant issues.

The beneficiaries of these programs were not only Horn of Africans, but many others, such as migrants from Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe, have received training or employment through this initiative. Furthermore, the project, despite some difficulties, shows the job seekers that if they persevere they are more likely to find the jobs that they were trained for. Similarly, it can be argued that the project has exposed the overall problem to the policy makers, and made them aware of the experiences of African job seekers.

The project has also secured both jobs and training to the members of the HoA communities who will, hopefully, change the preconceived notions that many employers have about African workers.

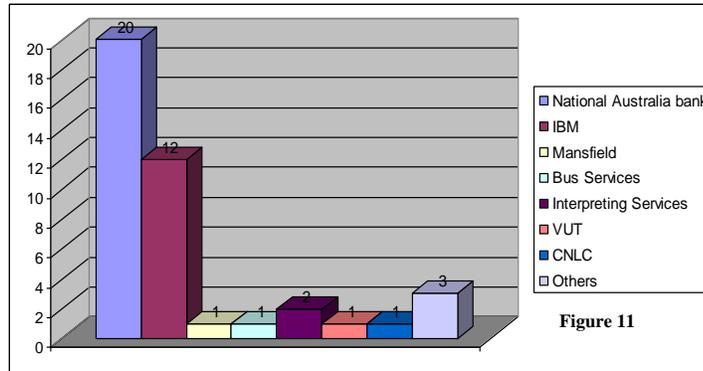
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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/africans-face-racism-tanner-20080730-3ng4.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/plea-to-mentor-african-refugees-20081123-6etw.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.newaustraliamedia.org/node/68>

The biggest contributors to the training area of this project were National Australia Bank followed by IBM (see figure 11).



However, there were many other firms that have provided some level of training to unskilled members. As a matter of respect and a show of appreciation, I would like to mention that the first firm that employed a HoA accountant was Proactive Tax and Business Services, in Mansfield. The hired accountant was Mr. Farah Jama (see Figure 12) from the Horn Afrik project, a Monash University graduate with a Masters degree in Accounting, who later became a Finance Minister of Puntland State of Somalia and made enormous changes in his portfolio to balance the State's income and expenditure.



Minister of Finance  
Puntland, Somalia. Figure 12

Puntland State of Somalia is one of the two States in Somalia that are relatively stable and functioning. Interestingly, while I was preparing this report, I contacted the above mentioned accounting firm to ascertain their official business name, and they told me: 'We have ongoing contacts with Mr. Farah and we are glad that our former staff member has got a ministerial position in Somalia'. Apart from Farah there are other three Melbournians who were immensely supported in the past by the project and who are now working in Somalia as senior officials.

When many firms have joined the program such as National Australia Bank, IBM, Australian Post, Australian Unity, service providers have been engaged and recruited by the employment and training bodies so they can provide professional support to the trainees. The service providers act as organizers and providers of professional and cultural support. The trained Horn of African people have appreciated these kinds of support as they settle and adopt in their new work environment.



Commented [M4] : Mary comment- Omar who?

<b>Figure 13</b>
<b>Abdullahi Habib</b> (above) is a Somali-Australian and he has Masters of Business: Enterprise Resource Planning Systems. Habib graduated from VUT in 2005. Major in:
• Enterprise Resource Planning Systems
• Business Process Engineering
• Human Resource Information Systems (SAP HR)
• Enterprise Resource Planning Systems implementation
• Computerised Accounting (SAP FI)
• Client Server Technology
• Applications Programming Techniques (ABAP)
• Enterprise Resource Planning Applications (Data Warehousing)
• Strategic use of ERP Systems
• Supply Chain Management
• Organisation Change Management.
<b>Mr. Habib</b> was one of the IT members who had been given work placement by IBM, and he is currently doing work-placement in NAB.

### **Challenges that the project has encountered**

We have to emphasize that the goals and strategies that we have identified and adopted later were the most practical ones. Engaging the local politicians, utilizing the media to further explain the employment quagmire in the African-Australian community, encouraging the job seekers to be proactive, collecting their data, informing them about the available positions have all worked well. However, the global economic crisis and its negative effects to the economy were beyond our control. Relying, trusting, and pursuing regular procedures to find jobs for the unemployed, without establishing proper networking, were overestimated and initially naively trusted by the project.

Almost all the tasks that reception or Human resources previously handled are now managed by websites which are anti-social, unhelpful, and unable to render specific answers on the spot. Similarly, the negative effects of the IT services that have been introduced and put in place by most companies were beyond our estimations while mapping out the project plan. Moreover, and probably more controversially, some Australian companies are less welcoming to receive and fully trust the African applicant regardless of their qualifications. Many applicants have explained to the project that it seems that many employers put more emphasis on their names and the colour of their skin than in their qualifications. This comment is fully supported by research<sup>12</sup> been conducted by three academics from Australian National University who revealed societal prejudice against minority groups. These academics have particularly highlighted that those with Middle Eastern names have to make more applications before someone even responded to them compared to those with Anglo-Saxon names. Somali, Eritrean, north Sudan and some Ethiopian names have Arabic names, as in all cultures, most names originate from the religion.

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<sup>12</sup> *Does Racial and Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? This research has been conducted by Alison Booth, Andrew Leigh, and Elena Varganova for Australian National University.*

As a result of this unfortunate reality, many qualified job seekers have given up and decided to do whatever job that is immediately available, in order to make sure that they can feed their family and safeguard their social status and manhood. The social impact of this decision, particularly to the young generation, has been already discussed in the previous chapters. To repeat it again, if the father can not address his son's needs/demands, ranging from Nike shoes to a home tutor, then the father's status as guide and mentor will diminish. Similarly, the child may develop an attitude of disobedience and dissatisfaction.

The question examined by this project is why African-Australian migrants in Australia are struggling to find proper employment. Undoubtedly, Australia spends a large amount of resources to support migrant refugee communities. However, this doesn't necessarily guarantee the best outcomes. What about the Horn of African migrants who are living in North America, New Zealand and other countries? Are they experiencing the same situation or are they different and if so, why they are

different? As extensively researched by Haileluel<sup>13</sup> (Integration Strategies of Migrants and Refugees), who travelled to New Zealand, Israel, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, and

United States of America to compare and contrast how these countries handle the basic needs of new migrants. The research had a number of findings that we can compare with Australian experience. For instance, the unemployment within

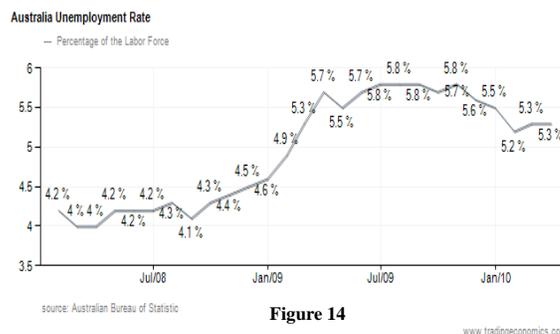


Figure 14

<sup>13</sup> Haileluel, who was a Churchill Fellow 2008, has been funded by the Churchill Trust

the Horn of African community (13.5%) was very high during the years of the economic boom in Australia (see figure 14).

In New Zealand, settlement strategy goals were designed to help its migrants to find employment as a first priority. The key goals consist of seven items and 'item two' clearly stated as follows: 'they should obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills' (Grogan, 2008:43-44). Still in New Zealand, in the social integration, among other programs, it creates volunteers to engage the new migrants and establish friendship with them. This practice provides the migrants the opportunity to learn more about anything and everything that they need to be viable a society.

In the United States, settlement services are highly outcome-focused and the employment and self-sufficiency within a specific period of time is the top measure of outcomes (Haieluel Gebre-selassie, Churchill Fellow 2008). Furthermore, according to Haieluel's research, in America, the service providers have to achieve 75% of employment outcome within 180 days, otherwise they will not be funded for the next round. In America employment and integration are intertwined. Moreover, in Canada, one affirmative action mandated that people from different background should be included in the city of Toronto's workforce. Do we have those initiatives in Australia? I did not see it, at least in practice. However, I was told by an officer from City of Melbourne that sometimes, if a particular project is focusing to a specific ethnic group, then it is highly recommended to employ someone from that ethnic group. The officer also told me that Equal Opportunity Commission could interfere and question if ethno-specific allocations is practiced by City of Melbourne without proper grounds.

Mr. Yusuf Omar, a PhD student from La Trobe University who travelled to USA and visited different States, as a part of his PhD research, identifies that when a Somali student finishes tertiary education, his/her immediate family celebrate for his/her graduation, as it is expected confidently that the person will soon land in a

more prestigious position. In America, Yusuf told me, there is an ideal referred to as the “American dream” and everybody wants to achieve that dream. These programs, initiatives and dreams are the sources of the success stories of those people, particularly those in United States and Canada to mention a few. Here, in Australia, most new graduates are un-noticed and most of them, eventually, end up in the taxi industry or they travel to overseas to find a decent job. Most of them, those who went overseas, have stated they would like to stay here with the rest of their family and pay back to the country that helped them to find and build a new life. Some of them have managed to find the jobs that they were trained for but the number is depressingly minimal. Unfortunately, our project operated under these circumstances as explained in this report, and yet despite the absence of effective policies plus so many hindrances; the project has made some progress.

Most obstacles that the Horn of African members face from Australian employees are; preconceived mistrust, racial motivated concern and fear of the unknown. However, it is important for the Horn of African job seekers to persevere and challenge to utilize the professions that have been provided to them by local universities and Australia’s human rights law. Giving up and picking up whatever the current status quo has offered to you is an acceptance of failure and degrading. Surely, the window of opportunity that Lindsay Tanner has opened for the African professionals and supported by many corporate's is commendable, and despite its limited long term effects thus far, in future may change some problems that exist today.

## Conclusion

The Horn Afrik project for Employment, Training and Advocacy has achieved success in many areas despite some challenges. It engaged the community by highlighting the opportunity that exists for them. The project has secured employment, training and recognition of their dilemma, not only for Horn of Africans, but many people from all over Africa. Engaging the local politicians was effective. How the Federal Minister of Finance and Deregulation responded to the projects plea and acted was exceptional, commendable and unforgettable. The project also engaged many African leaders to openly discuss the issue. For example, Dr. Berhan Ahmed<sup>14</sup>, the President of African Think Tank, has engaged the media to explain how African professionals are not getting the jobs that they were trained for. Dr Berhan has proposed that there must be mentoring and networking programs that could help the unemployed people.

The project was able to provide a number of services to the local community, and those from further away, as the office became known as a place where people could go to get a range of help. The beneficiaries of the project were, as mentioned earlier, not only from Horn of Africa but many parts of Africa such as Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and others. Hopefully, the jobs that have been obtained by the African professionals will change the preconceived notions that many employers have about African professionals. The support and work placement of the various corporates were essential to the community in general. National Australia Bank, IBM and now Australian Post have provided work placements, while National Unity, Victoria University, JSS and AMES were either providing support, working as organizers or as a go-between.

However the greatest achievement of the project was challenging the attitude of the employers to show how the workplace would be different if many African

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/plea-to-mentor-african-refugees-20081123-6etw.html>

professionals would be placed in permanent jobs. Many qualified Horn of African migrants left this country to find decent jobs overseas and they were successful in doing so. The fact is that many Africans are unable to get any jobs in Australia except menial ones, and yet one can manage to get the highest seat of office in his country of birth! This has led the young generation of Australians with African backgrounds to question their rights, ability and status in Australia.

Commented [M5] : Mary Comment- Omar check

Nevertheless, the project strongly believes that the African job seekers can continue to show some kind of perseverance to find the jobs that they were trained for without resorting to accept menial jobs. Surely, it is understandable that many African professionals can not remain unemployed for a long period of time as they have to support their loved ones in Australia and those that they left behind, but giving up and picking up the minimum is not the option.

## Recommendations

**Mary – these recommendations are still not quite ‘there yet’ – more talk needed.**

To make sure that the situation of unemployment among African communities is addressed properly, there must be a specific targeted government policy that will help to improve the employment prospects of the African communities, particularly those with a refugee background from the Horn of Africa. Therefore, the project would like to put forward the following recommendations:

That there is additional support for African job seekers with a refugee background to find jobs that they were trained for.

Federally funded education programs are created targeting employers and encouraging them to employ people with refugee/ CALD backgrounds

That the Federal Government reinstate CALD specific job network providers that will recognise a support of the different employment needs of people with refugee backgrounds

**Commented [M6] :** Mary Comment- Omar where is this backed up in report?

The Federal Government should ascertain that all capable African-Australians learn the English language by supporting language providers.

**Commented [M7] :** As above

That Local Government should follow Canada’s lead with employment policies that strongly support the employment of new migrants living in their area.

## Appendixes

### Appendix 1

#### Africans Need Not Apply by Omar Farah



MELBOURNE - Many Horn of African people are struggling to find work in the jobs they were trained for despite job vacancies.

The local community believes the reason for this is not a question of their suitability; rather it is the colour of their skin and a socially irresponsible media who are preventing them from securing the jobs they have been trained to do.

A diverse group, the Horn of Africa community includes the Somali, Ethiopian, Sudanese, Djiboutian and Eritrean communities. From the 1990s onwards a sizable number of Africans, mainly from the Horn of Africa, were arriving in Australia.

Many were refugees, desperate to leave the civil unrest and structural fragmentation of their war-torn homelands and start a new life.

According to the 2006 census of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) there are 31,000 Horn of Africans in Australia. These communities have a comparatively younger demographic – and it is the younger members of the community in particular who are enjoying the new opportunities that Australia has to offer them, including political stability, a safe environment, free health care and education opportunities.

In particular, the communities' young offspring are catching up with the Australian social and education system. They are enrolling from primary to high school, and are mastering the language of their new land and its customs.

Others have graduated from local universities, including Monash, Melbourne, La Trobe, RMIT and other universities all over the country, obtaining Diplomas, degrees, Masters and PhDs in different disciplines.

The community does have its success stories. Some are working in highly paid and highly respected positions, in a wide variety of careers - everything from Banking to the Defence industry, but, unfortunately these are exceptions.

Statistically the communities' level of unemployment is very high despite their training and the availability of the jobs that they are applying for.

The 2006 census shows that in Victoria, the Sudanese's unemployment rate is 38.2 percent compared to 5.4 percent Victorian wide. Similarly, in the same census, it shows that Somalia's unemployment rate is 32.2 percent, followed by Eritreans and Ethiopians that are 19.9 per cent and 17 per cent respectively.

This raises the question as to why Horn of Africans are having difficulties finding employment, when they are educated and trained? Clearly it is not because of a lack of qualifications, residential status or because of the absence of employment opportunities.

When the community was new and emerging, obstacles included the issue of overseas qualifications and how they often didn't match Australian requirements. Now the communities' local graduates are facing yet another obstacle – a lack of experience. Many unemployed local graduates have accountancy and IT qualifications – two professions which are experiencing a desperate shortage of qualified workers.

As reported in *The Age*, the Australian Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Mr Lindsay Tanner, spoke at length about this issue at the 2008 Redmond Barry Lecture at the State Library.

The Minister said "I am now encountering African-Australians with high-level qualifications from Australian universities who can't find jobs ... Their degrees are from Melbourne, not Mogadishu, but they're finding it just as hard to find employment."

Furthermore, some African job seekers, who were called for interview, have claimed that they were told, after a strange and bizarre reception and with no formal interview, that they would be contacted later. But were never called back.

Mr Abdiwahid Hassan, a lecturer of finance in the School of Accounting and Finance from Victoria University said several issues were preventing the community from securing professional positions.

He said: "The main obstacles that the community face when trying to get a job in the profession they have been trained for is actually the absence of strong networking and mentoring".

He added: "Some qualified people have the tendency to pick up the easily available jobs rather than persevering to find the jobs that they were trained for".

However, Farah Jama, a job seeker, who has a Master in Accountancy from Monash University said he believed some employers were hesitant to employ Africans purely because they have never worked with Africans before.

He said: "Often the only idea they have about a new applicant is what was happening in some parts of the continent and are not properly assessing what the new applicant is capable to do here in Australia."

Adding to the communities' problems is an unsympathetic and often inflammatory local press.

Some members of the community are openly critical about the mainstream media, whom they believe do not fully understand or appreciate the difficulties of the settlement process, and are often quick to report the community's perceived shortcomings. Bad press could undoubtedly have an impact on potential employer's willingness to hire people from this community.

The first Australian-born of Horn of African background are just finishing high school. Born and raised in Australia, these young people hardly know anything else but Australia, consider themselves to be Australians (with a Horn of Africa background) and have fully adopted the Australian way of life, taking on very little of their parent's culture.

That so many teenagers from this community consider themselves to be wholeheartedly Australian, contradicts the Herald-Sun's distortion of facts and statistics which repeatedly infer that many Africans living in Victoria are refugees with criminal records.

For example Mr. Liam Houlihan said in his article Fears our crime being imported (Herald Sun, March 09, 2008), that: "an analysis of the police statistics and 2006 Census figures shows on average one in nine Victorians born in Somalia committed crime in the State last years". This analysis was disputed and proven to be incorrect by ABC TV's Media Watch program on the 24 of March 2008.

According to Media Watch, the Police record did not say committed crimes, but it instead is uses the phrase alleged offenders. Also, it did not specify the number of offenders but the number of cases that the police have processed.

Obviously, a few of the younger members of the community will have problems with the law, but this is neither surprising nor unique to the Horn of African community. However, how the issue is explained and identified by the media is:

When a teenager with African background commits a crime, the crime is committed by Africans – and the whole community is being judged. However, one may argue that the majority of the Australian public is unlikely to judge the Africans in that way. As reported recently by ABC radio, (World wants Obama as President,) sixty two percent of the Australian public wanted Barack Obama to become the American president. That would not be the case should they consider colour and one's origin.

From September 11, 2001, Horn of Africans, particularly the Somali community, were high on Victoria's print media radar, who regularly printed news reports that asserted some Somalis may have links with terrorist organization.

The Australian reporter Richard Kerbaz has extensively written on this issue in a tone that the community perceived to be a pure incrimination of the community. One of his articles included, Jihadis use foreign phone networks on February 23, 2008. However, thanks to the Australian justice system this news report was no more than media hype and no one has been charged as a result.

However, in this context, a Somali journalist, Mr. Issa Farah from SBS who is based in Melbourne has defended the media's role and anyone else who may have played a role in this matter. He also went on to criticize some members of the Somali community.

Issa said: "There is a strong rumour that the Somalia's alleged role of terrorist related stories has been circulated and exaggerated by some members of the Somali community.

He added: "This was intended to incriminate or defame their perceived-opponents and seek closeness to the authority - a practice that used to be acceptable and profitable back home. However, the media in question did not apply rationale but pursued a policy of creating sensalization".

Nevertheless, regardless of their colour, creed or cultural background these peoples in question are Australian. Their failure as well as their success is ours. We will enjoy for their achievement and will suffer for their loss. Therefore, we, from layman to lawmaker, should give them a “fair go”.

Omar Farah (MA international Development)

Project officer

Horn-Afrik Employment, Training and Advocacy project

Omarfarah@cnlc.org.au

**Appendix 2****Speech by The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP****Minister for Finance and Deregulation****New Paths to an Open Australia****2008 Redmond Barry Lecture****State Library of Victoria****Wednesday 30 July 2008, Melbourne**

A decade ago I wrote a book in which I argued that all the major debates about Australia's future could be understood by reference to one simple question: is Australia to be an open or closed society?

This question still runs through most policy debates in Australia. And it connects them with each other. Those who support open markets but not open migration, or open trade but not open government, struggle for coherence.

Open Australia reflects broad yet consistent principles about how we as a modern nation engage with each other and the world. These positions sometimes cross old ideological boundaries, turning one issue's reformist into another issue's reactionary. The natural coalition of reform in politics today draws in those who believe that our society, democracy and markets should operate unhindered by fear, secrecy and cronyism.

Today's issues are different from those of ten years ago, but they still reflect the choice between open and closed. The climate change sceptics amongst our conservative opponents are the intellectual heirs of the fortress Australia mentality, for example. They want to stop the world so Australia can get off.

Tonight I want to return to the theme of open Australia. There are many dimensions to this. Some obvious examples are climate change, deregulation, reconciliation, freedom of information, and Australia's engagement with the world. I want to focus on the way Australians engage with migrants and refugees.

I want to talk tonight about a community with whom I have a strong local connection: the African-Australian community. Their story is emblematic of both past successes and future challenges of an open Australia.

As globalisation has added to the economic and social strains experienced by our community, we've become a lot more interested in what makes us distinctive. While some contributions to this discussion have not been entirely coherent, it has brought a few underlying tensions and contradictions in Australian society to the surface.

Defining what makes us different is a subjective endeavour. We don't all adhere collectively to a defined set of values. We harbour many different senses of Australian identity. As John Howard quickly found when he tried to insert a preamble into our Constitution, what is obvious to one Australian is often objectionable to another.

So my sense of Australian values may be different from yours. It's difficult to think of values that all Australians would individually agree on. There are some things, however, that I think are deeply embedded in our collective spirit.

There is a sense of openness, energy and decency that is a very distinctive feature of the Australian character. Other words like fairness, tolerance and enterprise could be added, but I think openness, energy and decency are the words that best reflect who and what we are.

The phrases that reflect our values best are "have a go" and "give 'em a go". We believe in opportunity, but we expect effort in return. We are open to all, but we demand contribution in return for participation.

Few of the leading figures from our colonial era better reflect this Australian spirit than Sir Redmond Barry. While an extraordinary achiever, he was also quick to assist others in bettering themselves. Barry even opened up his personal library to the general public, to give working people learning opportunities that weren't easily accessible elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> I am delighted to honour his memory tonight.

Given Australia's modern history, it is hardly surprising that most debates about values quickly default to issues of race. It is no accident that the Howard

Government sought to insert its version of Australian values into citizenship requirements.

While the insidious role of racism in our nation's history can scarcely be denied, it should not be allowed to stand as a defining characteristic of who we are. In the Howard era, debate about Australian values often seemed to consist of an argument between those who would deny our racist past, and those who want to punish us for it.

I'd rather highlight the strengths of those values that I see as distinctively Australian, including values inimical to racism. Openness, energy and decency have made us what we are. Let's ensure they're at the heart of our effort to tackle the new challenges we face.

As a child I had some pretty unpleasant experiences at boarding school in East Gippsland. I also got an excellent academic education. And although I didn't realise it at the time, I received some serious lessons on the evils of racism.

In those days, the White Australia policy was still in place, indigenous Australians were treated with contempt, and other peoples were portrayed through ridiculous stereotypes. Yet the Anglican church worked hard to instil a more enlightened view into me and my fellow boarders.

This went beyond complacent sermonising and glib pieties. Our boarding house of about 60 boys included Aboriginal, Thai and Indian kids. Whenever race was an issue, the message from those in authority was clear and unequivocal.

When I was thirteen, an indigenous classmate who occupied the bed next to mine got involved in a confrontation with another kid in our dormitory. Harmless horseplay turned nasty when he accidentally trod on this boy's foot and hurt him. He was promptly hit with a volley of racist abuse, and being a good boxer, he responded with his fists.

Within minutes, both boys were in the Housemaster's office. We were routinely caned for such trivialities as talking after lights out and dirty phys.ed gear, so I expected my indigenous mate would be caned.

Much to my surprise, he wasn't. The message was clear. The sticks and stones rule didn't apply to racial abuse. His physical assault was overlooked because of

the racist provocation. In 1960s rural Australia, this was pretty unusual. Yet the school's position reflected deeply entrenched values of decency and openness, a willingness to allow people to succeed or fail on their merits, not the colour of their skin. These values made it possible for us to make the transition from the world of the White Australia policy to modern multicultural Australia.

While I was experiencing this at Gippsland Grammar School, another boy my age was also experiencing boarding school elsewhere in the same town. His name was Kevin Andrews.

Many years later, as Minister for Immigration in 2007 announcing a cut in the African component off the humanitarian immigration program, he said in a press release:

"Recent refugee and humanitarian arrivals from the region of Africa are continuing to experience difficulty in successfully settling in Australia, and the result is high levels of community concern" <sup>2</sup>

The reduction in the African share of the humanitarian program was actually driven by other factors, particularly increased need from other source countries such as Burma. This was entirely unremarkable. The African share of the program was 13 per cent in 1996-97. It peaked briefly at 70 per cent in 2004-5, and fell to 50 per cent in 2006-07. Andrews' announcement envisaged a further fall to 30 per cent.

By explaining a reduction in African immigration as a response to community concerns about immigration, Andrews sent shock-waves through African-Australian communities. I don't wish to add to the debate about his motivation. That's for a different discussion. My concern this evening is the impact experienced by African-Australians.

African-Australians are used to being attacked publicly. An obscure Sydney academic named Andrew Fraser attacked African immigration in 2005 as a recipe for crime, violence and other social problems.<sup>3</sup> That's just one of many examples. An Immigration Minister suggesting a particular community isn't integrating properly into our society is even more serious.

People who have fled from war and persecution and settled in a new, very different country inevitably feel extremely vulnerable. They receive “why don’t you go back to where you came from?” messages regularly. They can feel their difference from others in their new country very acutely. The challenges of settlement and integration are magnified by the sense that many people in their new country don’t welcome them.

When an Immigration Minister says they aren’t integrating adequately and uses this as a justification for reducing the immigration intake from their region, the message it sends is absolutely chilling. For people accustomed to the arbitrary and capricious behaviour of authoritarian governments, being told they aren’t really welcome by a government minister is extremely serious. As Lawrence Udo-Ekpo explains in his study of Africans in Australia, fear of deportation heavily influences the lives of many African-Australians.<sup>4</sup>

Black Africans have lived in Australia for much longer than most of us realise. There were black convicts in the First Fleet, and more arrived later until the British Government restricted their entry in 1838.<sup>5</sup> Two of the thirteen Eureka rebels tried for high treason, John Joseph and James Campbell, were of African descent.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the White Australia policy and restricted immigration opportunities, we have had African-Australians living among us for many years.

Now they are here in tens of thousands. Most come from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia. There are many others, from countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Zimbabwe. There are also many Africans from nations like Egypt, that tend to be seen more as Middle Eastern than African. And of course there are large numbers of white Africans from countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe in Australia. Needless to say, those who face the toughest challenges are black Africans.

African-Australians are citizens, workers, students, parents and business owners. They are a significant part of our community.

Many African-Australians have spent years living in refugee camps after escaping famine, war and torture. Many have lost close relatives including parents, siblings and children. Some don’t know whether their families are alive

or dead. Last year The Age interviewed a 17 year old Sudanese student at Noble Park Secondary College who spent an extended time in a refugee camp after watching his father shot dead in front of his family.<sup>7</sup> Stories like this are common. While the security and opportunity that settlement in Australia offers are obviously embraced with enormous gratitude, many African-Australians face major challenges adapting to life in Australia. In April I conducted an African Community Summit as part of the 2020 Summit process, where I explored these issues with African community representatives.

Many young African-Australians have had little schooling. In countries like Sudan there are no driver's licences. Traditional African family and communal structures perform functions undertaken by the state in western societies.

African-Australian parents struggle to adapt to Australia's individualistic culture, which in their eyes sets children against their parents and undermines parental authority. African kids with little formal schooling and modest English skills sometimes struggle in classes with better educated kids of the same age. They lack facilities in the home and the wider community, and in some cases end up in trouble with the police. They very rarely encounter a police officer who looks and sounds like them.

Black African-Australians experience petty racism often. Some also have to cope with antagonism towards Muslims. Such experiences are the ugly punctuation marks of an often painful and difficult adaptation process that is hard for Australians of Anglo origin to understand.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture provides vital assistance to the most traumatised refugees. The Foundation understands these settlement challenges acutely:

“the resettlement of the Dinka people from southern Sudan may mean the transition from a pastoral to an urban environment, from a communal to an individualistic culture, from a reliance on strong customary law and tribal traditions around marriage, children and family to diverse, multicultural society underpinned by values associated with individualism.”<sup>8</sup>

“The changing roles and loss of status of men, the isolation of women bringing up children alone, and the tendency of children to rapidly acquire attitudes that challenge their parents, generates tension and dysfunction within families.”<sup>9</sup>

“The strengthening of connections within a community helps to restore attachments that are vital to the recovery of people who have experienced the deliberate destruction of the bonds that bind communities together. Building relationships among the community helps to restore a sense of belonging and trust and provides natural networks of friendship and care that reduce the debilitating effects of fear and anxiety.”<sup>10</sup>

Tackling these challenges involves all of us. We have to allow African-Australians to be Australians. They are part of us. Udo-Ekpo quotes Dorinda Hafner, who migrated to Australia from Ghana:

“I have Australian citizenship and consider myself an African-Australian. Australians won’t let me be Australian, and that’s my frustration. Every time I say I’m from Australia they say ‘No, but originally?’ ”<sup>11</sup>

This sense of separateness is inevitably accentuated by the media. African-Australians are often subject to strident attack or patronising curiosity. Almost inevitably they are in the media because they are African and black, not because they are Australian.

The wider community sometimes gets a glimpse of the contribution African-Australians are making to our society, but much of that contribution goes largely unnoticed. And while it is important to assist African communities to tackle the enormous challenges they face, it is even more important to recognise and celebrate their achievements. Success stories are vital to progress.

I’ve encountered many success stories personally, and I’ve read about others. Like Abdulla Ahmed, a Somali of Ethiopian origin I first met in 1993 who has spent years raising money to build a hospital in the Ethiopian city of Raaso.<sup>12</sup>

Abdi Farah, a Somali who spent five years in a refugee camp, earned a Social Work degree from RMIT, set up the Horn of African Young People’s Network, and now serves on the Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council. Munira who runs the Sorghum Sisters catering company in Melbourne after leaving

Eritrea and living for years in Sudan.<sup>13</sup> The United Somali Women's Association of Victoria which helps people with mental health problems, youth issues and runs homework clubs. Akoch Manheim, who runs the Sudanese Lost Boys Association, set up the Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Project, and ran a Day of Appreciation for Sudanese young people to thank Australians for accepting them. Charles Ogada-Osir, a Kenyan medical specialist who lectured at Melbourne University and until his recent passing was for many years a mainstay of community organizations and activities at the Atherton Gardens public housing estate in Fitzroy.

There are many broader integration success stories too. In January 2007 the Tamworth City Council refused a request to help settle Sudanese refugees in Tamworth. The local community reacted, and 1600 people formally pledged to help Sudanese refugees integrate into the community. Six months later, young Sudanese refugee Diktor Malok observed "there is no more negativity now."<sup>14</sup>

BDS Pty Ltd, a shelving manufacturer in southern Brisbane, employs about 35 Sudanese workers. Their experience has been so positive that they use informal networks in the Sudanese community to recruit new staff. I encountered this success story several years ago when I visited BDS with a Parliamentary Committee. When I spoke to the manager last week he said the Sudanese workers were still doing well, and joked that he was worried about them learning Aussie work habits like sickies.

In many parts of country Australia, African-Australian refugees are working in tough low-paid jobs that employers find difficult to fill. Abattoirs from Colac to Tamworth rely on Sudanese workers to keep operating.<sup>15</sup> Aged care facilities now employ numerous African-Australian nurses.

In my electorate Debney Park Secondary College is running a successful program aimed at breaking down prejudice among parents fearful of sending their children to a school with a large African-Australian population. The proportion of local primary school kids moving on to the high school has increased substantially.<sup>16</sup>

There are many good things happening for African refugees in Australia. And there are many non-African-Australians helping them to settle and find opportunities.

Yet big challenges still remain. African-Australians still endure prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives. Adapting to different rules and cultural norms isn't easy. And difficulties in education and employment threaten to undermine all the wonderful progress that is occurring.

The biggest challenge of all is ensuring that African-Australian kids stay in school. And that challenge involves much more than just the things that happen in schools.

Education has been the pathway to long-term integration for previous waves of migrants. Most professionals of southern European origin have parents who worked in factories and made great sacrifices to ensure their kids enjoyed genuine opportunity in life. The integration of migrants from Asia has followed a similar pattern.

Whether or not African-Australian migration will follow this pattern is in the balance. Some of the dynamics are different. Patterns of the past don't automatically replicate themselves.

Everyone has heard of Somali taxi-drivers with Ph Ds. There are countless African-Australian refugees with high-level qualifications who've found it virtually impossible to work in their field of expertise in Australia. Our system of recognition of overseas qualifications is quite tough.

This is hardly a new problem. Earlier migrant groups have had similar experiences. A close friend of mine from university was the son of central European refugees. His father had a Doctorate in Law from his home country, but worked as a psychiatric nurse in Australia.

Now this problem has a new dimension. I am now encountering African-Australians with high-level qualifications from Australian universities who can't find jobs. Even in the midst of dire skills shortages. Their degrees are from Melbourne, not Mogadishu, but they're finding it just as hard to find employment.

Recently I launched a community program specifically designed to assist people in this situation. A list of examples was handed around. It made for sobering reading. One man had a Bachelor of Business (Electronic Commerce) and Master of Business (Enterprise Resources Planning Systems) from RMIT. He's an Australian citizen and speaks fluent English. He drives taxis part time and has been looking for work in his field of expertise since 2004. I've met a number of people like him in my electorate.

Why is this happening? Racial discrimination is undoubtedly one factor. A recent Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission report concludes:

"While much of the blatant racism and name-calling is a thing of the past, the discrimination people face today is more subtle, entrenched and much more difficult to identify and deal with."<sup>17</sup>

African-Australians with professional qualifications report that lack of experience is a huge barrier to finding a job. Unemployment therefore becomes self-perpetuating, as no-one will give them a go.

Beneath these factors is a more general problem. Black African-Australians have very limited networks in the wider community. The old school tie may not be quite as powerful as it once was, but professional employment opportunities are still heavily influenced by the informal connections of familiarity that attach to people who are well integrated into our society. Outsiders are subtly excluded by a complex web of invisible barriers. As Tamunu, a Nigerian-Australian of middle-class origins observes:

"Here, social connections are the be-all and end-all, the key to getting a decent job. Highly qualified Africans are unemployed because they don't know people in high places, they haven't got connections..."<sup>18</sup>

It is not easy for any government to address this problem. And it seems strange to suggest that those African-Australians who should have the widest access to economic opportunity need assistance. Shouldn't we focus on those with limited skills and poor English?

The answer is of course yes, but we need to do both. The successful integration of African-Australians into our society depends on it. If African kids see highly-

qualified African-Australians routinely denied employment opportunities, they'll draw a very simple conclusion: there's no point staying in school. Therein lies the path to major long-term social problems.

The Rudd Government is doing many important things to assist the integration of refugee and humanitarian migrants into our community. The 2008 Budget extended an additional \$49 million to the Adult Migrant English Program, and allocated over \$30 million to the Settlement Grants Program for 2008-09. The humanitarian immigration intake has been increased. The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy offers intensive settlement support to newly arrived humanitarian migrants. This program assisted almost 10,000 people in 2007-08, approximately 35 per cent of them of African origin. Critically, the Government has drawn a line under the divisive rhetoric of the past. In a recent speech to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans said:

"the Rudd Government rejects the provocative remarks made by the former Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews, about the settlement prospects of Sudanese refugees."

"the Rudd Labor Government is firmly committed to supporting African refugees and others from that continent in humanitarian need."<sup>19</sup>

While barriers to employment for African-Australians with professional qualifications are difficult to tackle, we have to make an effort. It's difficult for government to interfere in the staff selection decisions of private companies, and even within our own agencies, it's not easy to envisage ways to address this problem. There are no simple solutions available.

The recent work of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission suggests some possibilities. The Commission argues: "migrant job seekers need to be actively supported through initiatives such as professional bridging programs, workplace mentoring and work experience."<sup>20</sup>

Australian business is treating its wider social responsibilities seriously. The business community is now pursuing a wide range of social programs to assist disadvantaged Australians, particularly those of indigenous background.

I'm not aware of any such programs focused on African-Australians. So I'm contacting a range of major businesses and professional bodies seeking their thoughts on how to help. And I'll be raising the issue within the Government. I don't want to displace any existing effort helping others, but even if only one company steps forward to help, it will be a big thing for the African-Australian community.

This issue is about how we see ourselves and how we see new arrivals in our community. More than most new arrivals, black African-Australians look different and sound different. They have different social customs and family patterns. Yet they want to be Australians. They shouldn't have to erase their backgrounds in order to do so.

I return to my initial thoughts about Australian values. I've got no doubt African-Australians will have a go, if we give them a go. Just listen to the words of Akoch Manheim on the joys of being Australian:

"there are no words to truly express how it feels for a stateless person to receive the privilege of citizenship in a country like Australia. It is a gift from God of priceless value."<sup>21</sup>

The question for other Australians is simple. Are we prepared to give them a go? I say yes. I know countless other Australians say yes. I'm pretty sure Sir Redmond Barry, who as a barrister regularly represented indigenous clients for no fee, would say yes.<sup>22</sup>

There will be plenty of set-backs along the way, but I'm absolutely confident of the longer-term outcome. I believe the ultimate Australian values, the positive values of have a go and give 'em a go, will triumph. Black African Australians need our support and understanding. If we're true to our values we'll give that support and understanding.

An open Australia must be truly open. Open to people of all backgrounds. The strength and vitality of our society comes from this openness.

Our nation won't be socially and culturally open unless we embrace African-Australian migrants in the same way we've previously embraced people from southern Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. We have to make an effort, not just sit back and allow them to sink or swim. If we do, the rewards for all of us will be overwhelming.

<sup>1</sup> Ryan, P.: Redmond Barry: A Colonial Life (Melbourne, 1980), p.22.

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, K: "Refugee and Humanitarian Intake 2007-08" (Press Release, October 4 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Colic-Peisker, V., and Tilbury, F.: "Being Black in Australia: a Case Study of Intergroup Relations" (Institute of Race Relations, Melbourne, 2008) p.42.

<sup>4</sup> Udo-Ekpo, L: The Africans in Australia: Expectations and Shattered Dreams (Seaview Press, Adelaide, 1999) pp.42-44.

<sup>5</sup> Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>6</sup> Udo-Ekpo, op. cit., p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Age, February 19, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, J., Kaplan, I., and Crowe, L: "Two Cultures, One Life", Community Development Journal Vol.42 No 3 (July 2007) pp.282-283.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.287.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.283.

<sup>11</sup> Udo-Ekpo, op.cit., p.91.

<sup>12</sup> Age, June 25, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Australian, February 20, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Sunday Telegraph, June 10, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Australian, February 20, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Age, July 20, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Equal Rights Commission: Harnessing Diversity (Melbourne 2008); quoted in the Age, July 17, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Udo-Ekpo, op.cit., p.137.

<sup>19</sup> Senator Chris Evans, speech to UNHCR, World Refugee Day (Canberra, June 20, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> VEOERC, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Tanner, L.: "Make Lost Boys Feel at Home", Herald-Sun, March 6, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan, op.cit., pp.19-20. [www.theage.com.au/national/hope-is-alive-despite-the-knockbacks-20080731-3nzq.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/hope-is-alive-despite-the-knockbacks-20080731-3nzq.html)

### Appendix 3

#### Snap shots of our members



A brief description of our clients who desperately looking for employment or retraining. Most of these candidates are local graduates and they are unable to find the jobs that they were trained for. I did not supply their names for privacy reasons but if someone wants to communicate with one of them, I am more than happy to provide the name with the consent of the person in question.

- Master of Business and Administration from California State University, USA, and he speaks fluent English language. He is Australian and he is formally unemployed. (He is currently teaching accounting at VUT as a sessional teacher on a part-time basis).
- Bachelor in accounting, MBA from Melbourne University. Officially unemployed and speaks fluent English language and he is Australian.
- Bachelor of Computer Science, and Diploma of accounting from SIDAM, Somalia. Unemployed and looking for an appropriate job in the last 4 years. He speaks English and he is Australian citizen.
- Bachelor in Agriculture (agronomist) from Somali National University, in Mogadishu working as a taxi driver, and would prefer to work in his profession. He has good English language skills and he is Australian citizen.

- BA in education from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and diploma in teaching for non-Arabic speakers. Unemployed and does volunteer work for the community. Good English language skills and he is Australian citizen.
- Bachelor in finance and information system, and master in professional accounting. Unemployed and does taxi driving occasionally for survival. Was unemployed since he finishes his study in 2005. (he is currently doing IBM work place program).
- BA, Master and PhD in Engineering. Unemployed but occasionally drive taxi for survival. He has very good English language skills. Additionally he is fluent in Mandarin language and he is Australian citizen.
- Bachelor of business (electronic commerce) and master of business (enterprise Resources planning system). Unemployed from 2004 and occasionally drives taxi for survival. Local graduate and speaks fluent English language. Australian citizen.
- Bachelor of Commerce and Master of international relationship from Osmania University, India. Unemployed since he arrived in the country in 2004. He has good English language skills. Australian Citizen. Now he drives taxi for survival.
- BA in accounting from VUT in Melbourne. Unemployed but some times works as a remittance agent. He speaks very good English language and he is Australian citizen. Now he drives taxi.
- Bachelor of Science in horticulture from Massey University in New Zealand. He has good English language skills. Australian citizen. Now he drives taxi.
- Bachelor of development studies from La Trobe University. He speaks English as a second language. Australian citizen. Now he drives taxi.
- Bachelor in accounting from La Trobe University. He has very good English Language skills. Australian citizen. Now he drives taxi.
- Bachelor of Commerce (Major in Accounting) from La Trobe University. His language English skill is excellent. Australian citizen. Now he drives taxi.

- Master of business, enterprise resources and planning from VUT, and speaks English language, Australian citizen and he is unemployed.
- Bachelor of Science (accounting). Graduated from Victorian University and speaks fluent English language. He is Australian and he is unemployed.
- Master of Science (Environmental management). Graduated from VUT, and speaks fluent English language. He is Australian citizen and he is unemployed.
- Bachelor of business (information system). Graduated from VUT, and speaks fluent English and he is Australian citizen and unemployed
- Bachelor of computer science and mathematics). Graduated from RMIT, speaks fluent English language, Australian citizen and unemployed.
- Bachelor of Science (ecology). Graduated from University of Adelaide, and speaks fluent English language. He is Australian citizen and unemployed.
- Bachelor of applied Science. Graduated from RMIT, and speaks fluent English language. He is Australian citizen and he is unemployed.
- PhD, Hydrobiology and Fisheries. University of Nairobi. Kenya. MSc. Hydrobiology and Fisheries. University of Nairobi. Kenya. BSc, Fisheries Studies. Somali National University, Mogadishu, Somalia
- Bachelor of Applied Science (Information Technology) (RMIT University, in 2006) Advanced Diploma of Computer Systems Engineering. Diploma of Information Technology (Network Engineering). Certificate 4 in Information Technology. Certificate 2 Information Technologies (NMIT – TAFE). Speaks fluent English, Australian citizen (casual at Westpac Bank).

If you need further details please contact Horn-Afrik Employment, Training and Advocacy project officer Mr. Omar Farah on 0419 881 826 or email: [omarfarah@clnc.org.au](mailto:omarfarah@clnc.org.au) or [dhollawaa@yahoo.com.au](mailto:dhollawaa@yahoo.com.au)