

**Business Social Networks, A Pathway to Socio-Economic Integration or Self-Exclusion and Exploitation? A Study of Durban Congolese Somali Refugees - Republic of South Africa**  
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**Abstract**

Social networks, as a form of social capital, represent the cornerstone of survival strategies of refugees in South Africa in absence of citizenship. Indeed, the socio-economic adaptation of refugees emphasise the role that these networks play in providing useful information about migration route, and costs and benefits; survivalist skills, and market niche, to their members. Social networks are also used as a safety net against shock, vulnerability, and unexpected events. However, social networks are subjects to age and gender bias because they are constructed from traditional values. As a result, social networks and their subsequent ethnic enterprises perpetuate what they initially intended to avoid: unequal access to information, rights, and privileges.

I used purposive sampling to select 20 entrepreneurs from both Democratic Republic of Congo and Somali refugee communities. In each community, I picked 5 most successful business people in the formal sector, and 5 in the informal of the Durban economy. The down fall of this method is that the findings cannot be generalized because it is not a probability sampling. I collected my data through interviews, participant observation, and personal insight as a refugee and chairperson of the institution which oversees other refugee organizations in the KwaZulu Natal Province. I analysed my data with NVivo qualitative software and the Constant Comparative Analysis.

Findings reveal the following. First, business social networks play a key role in providing survivalist jobs - irregular and low wages without social security - to new comers who often do not necessarily speak English or have no marketable skills in Durban. Yet, new comers, once settled, look for more rewarding jobs elsewhere with the intention of doing the same to those who will come later. However, the ethnic businesses which exist do not promote without problem the creation of the new ones because of age and gender bias, and class differential, which leads to unequal access to information and privilege.

Second, refugees perpetuate their self-exclusion by relying more on bonding within the networks rather bridging between communities including South Africans. Third, the most successful business people, in both informal and formal sectors, are individuals who operate in bigger ethnic size, and those who are able to expand their networks beyond the refugee communities to include foreigners and South Africans.

Fourth, religion plays important role in the success of the ethnic enterprises. Muslim refugees easily connect to the South African Muslim community in order to find specific market niches, factory shops that other refugees have no access to. As a result, they appear to be more successful - to the refugee's standard - than refugees who belong to other religious denominations including Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church.

Fifth, while business social networks remain, *ceteris paribus*, is a pathway to survivalist economic activities of refugees who arrived in the post-1994; they are beneficial to those who arrived in 1990s. Indeed, ethnic business prospers within the disadvantaged communities which are structurally excluded from the main stream economy. It benefits the well established refugees at the expense of the new comers.