

**A study of the South Sudanese refugees' perspectives of settlement in the western suburbs of Melbourne**

**Masters of International Community Development: A Minor Thesis**

**By William Abur**

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## Declaration

This declaration is being made certifying that this thesis is an original work performed by me. An acknowledgement is also given to all the academic sources and materials that has been referenced for the completion of this work.

I, William Abur, hereby declare that this research that is being reported in the thesis has been conducted according to the principle of ethical treatment for human participants that has been approved by the Victorian University Human Research Ethics Committee for this research.

William Abur

Signature ----- Date ----- May, 2012

## Abstract

The refugee community from the South Sudan is among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable community groups in Australia. Their settlement situation is problematic due to the many issues confronting them, including a lack of sufficient support services and language and employment barriers. Since resettling in Australia, the South Sudanese refugee community has faced settlement difficulties like making adjustments to the Australian way of life. The reality is that refugee community groups from non-English countries that resettle in developed countries come with high expectations of wanting to rebuild their lives quickly without consideration of unforeseen challenges of their new environment. Therefore, some groups end up being stricken by difficult settlement challenges.

The South Sudanese refugee community in Australia come from a difficult background of a long civil war that affected their community in many ways; many families and young people from this community are going through a recovery process from past traumas. During settlement in Australia, this community tends to have a higher risk of experiencing problems like homelessness, family breakdown, social isolation, financial hardship, poor health, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling problem, unemployment and young people involving themselves in criminal activities due financial hardship and chronic lack of employment. There are a wide range of issues that need to be fully understood when working with refugee groups, including psychological condition and the social, economic, cultural and political impact of forced displacement

This thesis is arguing that there should be an alternative approach and empathy in nurturing refugee communities in proactive ways rather reacting over their demanding needs while settling. This study has identified significant areas and made recommendations for the improvement of settlement services beyond five years. Furthermore, this study has identified effective intervention strategies that help refugee community groups address areas of unemployment, racism and discrimination, social isolation and alternative engagement strategies. These strategies can be achieved by boosting/creating cultural appropriate services to help the community in address past trauma issues and settlement issues in a way that is appropriate to their culture and experiences. This study is significant in providing a platform for further research and debate by highlighting settlement issues facing the South Sudanese refugee community while settling in Melbourne.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Why research this topic of the South Sudanese refugee's settlement and experiences? South Sudanese refugee groups are one of the newly emerging communities in Australia, and although they are a minority group their issues are visible in the social media due to the fact that many people in this community are struggling with settlement issues. The South Sudanese community is one of many refugee communities that were forced to leave their homeland because of civil war, cultural oppression and the denial of the basic human rights, including social and economic rights. While settling in Australia, they are faced with enormous settlement challenges including housing, employment, cultural adaptation and others. The high costs in Australian housing markets have brought significant consequences to the economically and socially disadvantaged South Sudanese community and other minority ethnic groups in Australia (Atem 2011).

This thesis is a study of the South Sudanese community in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The study focuses on settlement experiences and their understanding of settlement challenges facing the South Sudanese refugee community while they are settling in the western suburbs of Melbourne. This research has risen concerning issues of settlement for refugee communities. Significant issues such as unemployment, housing, racism and discrimination are mainly discussed from a community's perspectives with literatures drawn from different academic sources including book chapters, journal articles and reports focusing on refugees' issues.

Participants' views have been scripted based on their experiences and understanding of settlement issues in the community. The disappointing aspect of previous research is that while discussion has focused on critical issues facing the community in settlement related areas, it has not discussed the positives stories within refugee community groups, including the South Sudanese community, about the successes of settlement in Australia. This is a very interesting topic of research that needs to be explored separately.

This study has explored critical issues that are taken for granted by others and yet they are really pressing issues for refugee community groups. Findings and discussion have been drawn heavily from community's perspectives on common issues. Literature has been drawn from many sources including government reports and settlement policies. The overall aim of this research is to inform service providers, governments, and the wider community

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and to provide a voice for the South Sudanese community on the common settlement issues. Secondly, it contributes to existing literature on settlement and refugee issues in a broadening context. Understanding refugees' social conditions and historical, cultural, economic and political backgrounds, including difficulties encountered during settlement period, is fundamentally important in reshaping settlement policy.

Settlement and refugee experiences have been researched frequently in many parts of the world based on refugee groups resettling in another country and the social issues surrounding the host country. For example, African refugees that are resettled in higher income countries like Australia face certain challenges, such as family breakdown, parenting, unemployment, racism and discrimination issues (Renzaho 2011). Among the challenges that refugee and migrant settlers find pressing is a struggle to adjust to the new culture and integrate into mainstream services. This happens because the practices and values that are being reflected in their new environment are sometimes inconsistent with the African communities' values and traditional way of engaging community groups.

### ***1.1 Key objectives of study***

This study investigates the South Sudanese community's perspective of settlement and the challenges facing them in their settlement journey in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The first objective is to investigate and discover the communities understanding of settlement based on their experiences. The second objective is to ascertain whether the South Sudanese community's understanding of settlement is different from the government's settlement policy. There is a parallel understanding of settlement issues between refugee community's perspective and government's settlement policy over how long it takes for refugee community groups to integrate and settle fully in the mainstream community. Settlement context and issues appeared to be hardly understood in by many people, including the newly arrived communities from non-English speaking backgrounds such as the South Sudanese community or people in the existing mainstream community. Significantly, the government's settlement policy appears to be putting all refugee communities in one box regardless of their non-English or English backgrounds. Understanding the settlement experiences from the refugee community's perspective and government's settlement policy is very critical. This study cannot claim to be a holistic capturing of all social issues related to

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settlement but some essential issues such as unemployment, housing, racism and discrimination, family conflict, cultural shock and language barriers are discussed.

## *1.2 Significance and contribution*

This study of the South Sudanese refugee community is profoundly important for the community, services providers and the Australian government to understand the critical social issues facing this refugee community. It contributes to existing literatures on refugee policy and settlement issues and it can assist policy makers and individual members of society who are interested in refugee issues. It is essential to understand the refugee community groups' social issues, settlement conditions, historical background, and their cultural, economic and political perspectives. This research is driven from the community's experiences and knowledge of settlement issues. Understanding community knowledge and experiences is a vital and powerful process when working with disadvantaged and marginalised communities, such as refugee communities. As conflict emerges from humans competing over power and resources, the movement of refugees becomes unavoidable globally. Therefore a research study like this is useful for future works focusing on refugee groups that come from a similar conflict background to the South Sudanese refugee community.

In some cases, refugee community groups are stereotyped and downplayed by host communities because of their disadvantages. Some people failed to understand challenging issues that face refugee groups while settling in host countries. It is important that people understand refugees' social issues, culture, the reasons of being refugee as well as support that they needed to overcome settlement challenges (Atem, 2011). A study like this research on refugees' issues can help in informing the host society and the government official on pressing social issues surrounding refugees' lives. There are many overriding issues that facing refugee community groups that need to be considered when planning refugees' settlement programs. These issues include a consequence of being in conflict situations and displacement. Displacement alone affects individuals and refugee families seriously apart from trauma as a consequence of conflict as many refugees witnessed death and despicable acts. Displacement can lead to an increase in isolation, poverty, hostility, family breakdown and racism (Lavender & Briscoe 2009).



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By capturing an understanding of settlement from the South Sudanese community's perspective, this study can contribute to existing knowledge in the field of refugee study and inform people on social issues and challenges surrounding refugee groups when settling. The need for human movement is growing due to human conflict and failure of governments to protect their own citizens. As a result, there is a strong need for knowledge collection to shape contemporary debates around refugee policies and service delivery. The field of refugee studies has become one of the important fields in humanities study (Renzaho et al 2011). There is a human need for mutual communication and meaningful understanding of culture practiced within communities. Understanding and communication can be difficult. Communication is filtered through pre-existing meanings and may be shaped by gender, politics and the influence of society's culture. Understanding between refugee communities and the host community appears to be complicated by language barriers and negative concepts on refugee communities (Lavender & Briscoe 2009).

The community's knowledge and the settlement issues identified in this study will shape practice and help in delivering services to refugee community groups, particularly refugee groups from an African background due to the many similarities in culture and conflict related issues. Some research studies like this study of the South Sudanese community are needed for an early intervention in social policy particularly in understanding social issues affecting refugee groups such as family breakdown, domestic violence, social isolation, disengagement of young people and financial pressure (Renzaho et al 2011). Community services such as community development, social work, and financial counselling and refugee policy development must be informed by social issues faced by refugee groups so that they can be prepared and deliver services that sufficiently meets the needs of refugee community groups. The findings of this study is once again significant and can be used by services providers and policy makers to help families from refugee backgrounds by addressing their needs accordingly (Renzaho et al 2011 ).

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Settlement experiences can be challenging and difficult for refugee communities and individuals. People often experience feelings of homesickness, isolation and culture shock and many others that compound people's abilities to settle during the transitioning of starting new life in new country. Newly arrived refugee communities from Africa are faced with all these issues. Their settlement situation can be miserable, particularly to people who have no networks or support services from relatives and friends (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011).

There is no doubt that people who have lived for long periods in refugee camps had difficult experiences and faced a high level of poverty, including low levels of education or no education at all (Nicholl and Thompson 2004). Some have suffered terribly from posttraumatic disorder as a result of conflict and displacement (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011). Refugee groups often escaped in stressful circumstances, some experienced separation between various family members during escapes and some may have witnessed the death of loved ones. They could also have witnessed gruesome events like war, torture, rape, murder, imprisonment, physical injury or genocide while fleeing from their homeland (Nicholl and Thompson 2004). Settlement can be more difficult and stressful for refugee groups that had lived for long periods in refugee camps and experienced displacement from place to place without support services. (Turner & Fozdar 2010).

### 2. Refugee Theory

According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention), a "refugee" is defined as a person that left their country of their nationality with a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country (Tipping, 2010). In other words, refugees have been forced to leave their homes without the time and opportunity to pack their belongings, or say farewells. Most often, they leave their homes secretly for the fear of being found out by conflict groups. They are running away from their hometown and country without knowing if they will ever return. Most refugees will go to any country that offers them safety. They come to this 'refuge' carrying the memory of violent and terrible experiences (Turner & Fozdar 2010). They may

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be survivors of a war-torn nation, internment or rape camps, and they come to the new country with little or no knowledge of its culture and language. In the case of children, experiences may include interrupted schooling and severe trauma. So, unlike migrants who choose to move to a country for economic or personal reasons, refugees have no choice. Refugees also require a higher degree of care, counseling and medical services. The most important difference between a migrant and a refugee is that the former can return home any time. The refugee, on the other hand, may never see home again or never meet loved ones who were left behind (Harte et al, 2009).

## *2.1 Refugees and UNHCR*

The people whom the UNHCR have identified as refugees are allowed to apply for a status of refugee to those countries that signed the Refugee Convention. As a result of an increasing number of refugees and humanitarian entrants, the United Nations (UN) had established the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950. Since then, the UNHCR has been mandated by the UN General Assembly to assist and protect refugees, asylum seekers and internal displaced people (IDP). Its mandate is to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, and its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees (Tipping, 2010).

Australia is one of the countries that has signed the convention and has resettled many refugees. The majority of the South Sudanese in Australia have arrived through the help of the UNHCR in refugee camps; the process itself is very difficult for the refugee. They experience a high level of homesickness and isolation. This is aggravated by culture shock that further hinders their ability to begin their life in Australia. The impact of integrating into a new society can often cause high levels of stress and anxiety for refugees (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011). Besides a shared traumatic past, many refugees may have experienced poverty, poor quality or total absence of formal education, and may have low or no levels of English knowledge. If they were living in a refugee camp prior to their arrival, they may have no concept of interacting with society and its institutions such as banks, hotels etc. These are some of the reasons that refugees in a country like Australia struggle with unemployment, English language barriers, post-traumatic disorders, general health and cultural issues (Harte et al, 2009).

## *2.2 The South Sudanese community*

For the many years of conflict in Sudan between the Southern Sudanese and the Northern Sudanese, only a little is known by international communities about how badly the people of Sudan have been affected by the long civil war. The war between the North and South of Sudan has claimed an estimated two million lives, with many millions more homeless and displaced (Coker, 2004). The roots of this war lie in long-standing ethnic and religious hostility between the lighter-skinned Arab-Muslim rulers of the North and the mostly Christian ethnic groups in the South, fuelled by the discovery of oil in the southern provinces (Deng, 2005). As a result of the devastating conflict, the South Sudanese refugee group entered Australia between 2002 and 2005 under the Refugee Convention. During this period Sudan was at the top of the Australian Humanitarian Program. Many families decided to settle in Melbourne's western and eastern suburbs because of rental affordability and community connection. During the period of transition and settlement, the community is faced with many social issues and problems on top of what many refugees have already gone through before their arrival to Australia. Such past suffering includes traumatic life experiences in conflict zones and in refugee camps, displacement and separation of family members (Tipping, 2010).

The experience of migrating and resettling can significantly disrupt a refugee's social world. Their social relationships become lost or fragmented while the social network becomes crumbled and remaining families dislocated. The past social world is vanished while a new economic, political and cultural context is formed. The refugee's war-related suffering is reinforced by challenges and loss that are migration related (Westoby, 2008). Predominately, the South Sudanese community came to Australia under the Australian Humanitarian Program as a result of being victims of civil war between the North and South Sudan. Since Sudan's independence in 1956 until January 2005 there was an almost continuous war between the North and the South resulting in 2 million people being killed and 4 million people being displaced (Tipping, 2010). Although South Sudan became an independent nation in 2011, large numbers of South Sudanese refugees are still living in exile, in places such as the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, refugee camps in Uganda and Ethiopia, and urban refugees residing in Cairo (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

Generally, refugees in refugee camps start their resettlement processes with help of the UNHCR as well as Australia's Humanitarian Program that visit camps and conduct interviews. Conditions in refugee camps are often unbearable as UNHCR only provides for basic services needed for survival (Tipping, 2010). Upon arrival in Australia, these refugees face considerable challenges in adapting to a new life, a new system and a new culture. Time is needed for them to adapt to the new environment, culture and language. Their experiences from past conflicts and refugee camps would have eroded the skills and abilities of refugees. These experiences have been reinforced by the settlement difficulties but the community members have tried their best to support one another during difficult times (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). However, there are many barriers and limitations for South Sudanese community members to provide consistent help to families and young people who face a higher risk and are more vulnerable to the challenges of settlement. The South Sudanese community members tend to live in different suburbs far apart and yet their community's social fabric still brings them together to celebrate cultural events (VFST, 2006).

### *2.3 Reasons for settling in western suburbs of Melbourne*

In the recent years of South Sudanese refugees settling in Melbourne, many families chose to settle in the western suburbs due to the availability of cheaper housing. The South Sudanese community and other refugee communities were very much attracted to the cheap housing and other services that refugee communities could not afford to pay in more expensive suburbs of Melbourne. According to the South Sudanese people, community is about sharing common values, beliefs, customs, relationships, languages, skills, ideas, goods and services as well as protection from enemies. All these shared reciprocal benefits apply to each member of the community (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

The perception of community in South Sudan is linked to a sense of responsibility and respect, especially to their own ethnic group. People see community as a group of people that share many interests of relationships, networks and so on. However, defining a community can be problematic. People often use common expressions such as society and social group to describe a community (Anderson 2011). Establishing community groups is fundamentally important for refugee groups that come from a communal society base. Having connections with people from the same background is fundamentally important in terms of networking, participation in social events and helping vulnerable community members. Therefore, community is considered as a network that consists of relations, which can bring a sense of

connectivity, belonging and caring for vulnerable members. However, these relationships and connections seem to be overridden by the settlement challenges and struggles of families coping in a new country. According to Westoby 2008, there are some important strengths within refugee communities that need to be reinforced from government agencies by providing the necessary support services. Community leaders from refugee communities work tirelessly day and night supporting their community members in a volunteering capacity. Unfortunately, refugee community leaders are not getting enough support services from government agencies due to a lack of resources. There is a need for refugee community leaders to be empowered to continue helping vulnerable families and young people in their communities (Westoby 2008).

## *2.4 Settlement definitions*

Settlement is defined as a period of transitioning and adjustment in a new country. Refugees and migrants require support services and guidance during their settlement period (DIAC, 2012). According to the Australian government's settlement policy, settlement is referred to as an orientation period and process of helping newly arrived refugee families and individuals with basic support services to gain social connection and develop economic independence while their basic needs are met (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011). This period is a difficult time for transitioning and family units and individuals usually feel a significant amount of pressure and stress. The key challenges of this transition period of settlement include adjusting to a different cultural, legal, education and housing system, financial stress because of unemployment and general health matters (Tipping, 2010). Settlement policy is designed to cater settlement services to all humanitarian groups such as refugees, asylum seekers and other humanitarian entrants including individuals arriving under family reunification. This concept of settlement policy is based on providing assistance to refugees and humanitarian entrants to settle better and enable them to have full participation in Australia's social, cultural, political and economic activities.

People from refugee backgrounds are faced with many difficulties including psychological issues. Some of these issues are comprised of post-migration challenges such as displacement experiences and the lack stability of a permanent home. Refugees require advocacy and political pressure at the government level to ensure that possible challenges facing refugees' families are addressed and their needs are met by the government and settlement programs (Al-Qdah et al 2010). There is always a lack of a comprehensive

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understanding on how young people interpret settlement activities and what it means for them, given the fact that issues of literacy and language are prominent for youngsters with disrupted schooling (Gifford et al 2007). This is mostly caused by a lack of engagement and integration into mainstream activities such as the workforce. For refugees, gaining employment and housing are major barriers due to a lack of previous qualifications. Many families from refugee communities consider employment as first priority to support their family members overseas or in Australia. However, securing jobs is difficult for them in many ways (Ager et al 2008).

In some cases, a lack of awareness of legal rights, discrimination in the workforce and lack of ability to access employment and training opportunities can be stressful (Ife 2010). These challenges subsequently lead to high level of family conflict, divorce or separation and a lack of financial support to young people that lead them to drop out from school and being disengaged from families and their community. Refugee families also find it difficult to parent and rear children in a new culture that is totally different from their previous experiences of parenting in their original country. Some refugee community groups have lost their previous spirit of communal caring of children. For example in many African societies, children belong to the community and the community take full responsibility of caring for children within villages.

Refugee communities find it hard to maintain communal community caring for children. Community caring for children is different in some parts of the world; for example, it is hard to find a young person at train station misbehaving and intervene at midnight by taking full responsibility as done traditionally in some societies. Therefore, community structure, parenting values and community caring for children is lost in a sense that nobody could interfere with young people when they are displaying unacceptable behaviour. Many children from dysfunctional families and communities can easily enter the child protection system and justice system. Parents can experience the hardship of dealing with child protection (Strong Bonds Jesuit Social Services, 2011).

Many families and young people who arrived as refugees from African countries find themselves overwhelmed by the settlement challenges in Australia (Tipping, 2010). The settlement tensions emerge from time to time among the family members, young people and parents (Renzaho et al 2011). Refugee families are struggling to integrate into the mainstream system because of overwhelming challenges of settlement. Some of the settlement issues

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faced by the community are complex. These include conflict in family which results in family breakdown, young men and women dropping out from school, and people having constant troubles with the police due to disengagement that lead to negative activities such as drinking and social gang groups (Renzaho et al 2011). The legal aspect of child protection is very much new to refugee community groups that come from African countries including South Sudan. The expectations that come with some refugee community groups are the expectation of free services like free housing. The reality is that it is not easy to get housing without working hard and paying rent as well as other living expenses. The only benefit sometimes is a special concession made to address the specific needs of the refugees and participants of humanitarian programs (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011).



## Chapter: Three. Methodology

The method used in this study is a qualitative research method in which open-ended questions were used for investigating settlement issues and experiences of participants. The qualitative research method is commonly used in many fields including fields of community development and refugee studies. Qualitative methods involve conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. In some cases, a researcher may want to do research by asking participants and staff about a program they are involved in, and about their experiences and expectations in relation to the program. Participants can share their experiences and thoughts about program operations, processes, and outcomes and their concerns (Boyce and Neale 2006). Qualitative methods are very effective and they provide a relaxing atmosphere in which information can be collected easily through conversations. People may feel more comfortable having a conversation with a researcher about their program as opposed to filling out a survey (Cynthiawoodsong et al 2005).

In this research, data is collected and analysed according to the ethics approval from Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Six participants were interviewed and desktop samples of government's settlement policy were explored. Gender was considered by recruiting three women and three men from the ages of 19 years old to 46 years old. Names of participants have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality and privacy. Pseudonym names have been used in this study, meaning the names given to participants in this research paper are not reflecting real names of people who were interviewed. Verbal consent was obtained from participants to avoid intimidation of paperwork and signing. Through this research, participants were engaged in a flexible and respectful method to enhance their confidence and full participation in the interview. This was done by allowing participants to choose a closed and convenient venue for the interview; time was arranged according to their availability and personal information was coded anonymously (Boyce and Neale 2006).

### *3.1 Methodological option*

The perspective used in this study of a South Sudanese refugee community is derived from a combination of social, cultural, historical, economic and political views of community (Deng, 2005). This combination presents an understanding of the local issues that were

pressing to South Sudanese people. People feel vulnerable when they think they are alone and are not understood by authorities or when their problems are not being fully understood according to their experiences and knowledge on local community issues (Rubin 2010).

Local knowledge is not geographical knowledge in this context. It is about what people know based on issues and experiences in their settlement journey. Newly arrived communities may have different understandings of their local issues based on what they know as issues affecting them while they are settling. They may have different perceptions and understandings of settlement that may be different or similar to the Australian government officials' definition and understanding of settlement. The ideological and theoretical ideas used in this study are not new. It is a concept drawn on several understandings of community development and local resources that encompass change from bottom up approaches theory (Deng, 2005) based on local knowledge and experience. The experience and local knowledge is a powerful theory to be used in this study to back up the argument and definition of settlement at a community level. Ife (2010) argues that the bottom-up approach is a crucial and necessary process. It is based on a premise that local knowledge, wisdom, skills and understanding are necessary for learning from the experiences of the community, and need to be valued above top-down wisdom and experiences. The top-down perspective is power-oriented and is characteristic of modernity with its search for certainty (Tesoriero 2010). According to Ife (2010), valuing the wisdom, knowledge and skills of community members is an essential part of bottom-up development. People feel that their experience and wisdom are marginalised or denied by those who claim to know better because of their position. In certain instances, change from below is necessary in the community and it brings about valuing local knowledge, culture, resources, skills and processes. Emphasis is based on the importance of community development principles. Society's best interest will be served if power is shared by accepting change from below as a way forward in working with local community (Tesoriero, 2010).

### *3.2. Research questions*

The following four research questions were asked during interview to investigate the community's understanding of settlement issues based on their experiences.

1. What does settlement mean for you and is your understanding of settlement similar to the Australian government's understanding or policy?

2. What are the settlement challenges?
3. What do you do to improve your settlement situation?
4. Do you know who does the settlement work and were you helped during your settlement period?

The following sub-questions emerged from the above main questions:

1. What does "settlement" mean for you and is your understanding similar to the Australian government's understanding and policy? Why and why not?
2. Can you please give examples of 'good' or 'bad' settlement in your experience?
3. Can you please give examples of some of the challenges you faced during settlement?
4. What do you do to improve your settlement situation?
5. Are you aware of agencies that provide settlement services? If yes, could you please name some of the agencies? If no, why?
6. Has anyone helped you during your settling process so far? If yes who have helped you? What kind of assistance have they provided?
7. What you think needs to be done to improve settlement situation for people like yourself?
8. Do you think having employment in Australia may help refugees to settle better?
9. Do you think having an Australian education may help refugee communities to settle better?
10. If you have resided in another country beside Australia and your country of origin, how were the settlements experiences different in these countries?

## Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion.

This chapter is presenting discussion and findings based on the community's experiences and understanding of settlement and compared with the government's settlement policy. The South Sudanese community have experienced a number of settlement issues as one of the newly emerged communities in Australia. The research is only drawn from the South Sudanese community members who live in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The experiences of the South Sudanese community in this region can also relate to other regions of Australia where the South Sudanese refugee group are living. There is no doubt that newly arrived refugee community groups are experiencing substantial challenges although some government funded programs are available to provide support services (Gifford et al 2007). Common challenges facing the South Sudanese refugee community include unemployment, language barriers, housing issues, discrimination and racism. Before discussing these critical settlement issues from the community's perspectives, it is essential to explore the Australian government's settlement policy and programs. The Australian government's settlement policy is based on the provision of settlement support services from the first day of arrival in Australia up until five years. The period of adjustment takes time and there are numerous factors that affect some refugees' settlement into Australia. These factors are based on their capacity to adjust, level of education obtained and the life skills a person acquires to adjust in new environment (Richmond, 2011).

### *4.1 Australia Migration Policy and Settlement Programs*

The Australian migration system was established during the 1850s to 1970s to address immigration related issues. It was fundamentally a homogenous migration system which mainly settled people of European origin. Such migration practices enabled European refugees to arrive in great number after the end of Second World War, which also enabled Australia to increase its population, address post-war labour shortages and promote economic progress (DIAC, 2012). This migration policy was deliberately designed to discriminate against other migrants and refugees that were not from European descent. This continued without significant change until the 1970s when the White Australia migration policy was abolished (Atem, 2009). The civil unrest and starvation in the African continent in recent decades has resulted in a significant influx of people of African descent migrating to

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Australia, mainly from countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and several other countries (DIAC, 2012).

As a result of ongoing immigration and settlement services, the Australian government continue to provide settlement services under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to assists migrants and refugees that entered through humanitarian settlement scheme to settle better in Australia. Many migrants and refugees entering Australia require settlement support services on arrival based on different needs such as employment, education, housing and health services. The government's settlement policy requires agencies to deliver these services to refugees and migrants by funding specialised agencies to deliver services (DIAC, 2012). The government is also pushing for mainstream agencies that deliver services to the wider community to ensure that their services are accessible to migrants and refugees. DIAC funded programs include the provision of English language tuition through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), financial grants to community and service organisations through the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), and initial humanitarian settlement support services through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program and the Complex Case Support (CCS) program (Richmond, 2011).

#### *4.1.1. Adult Migrant English Program*

The AMEP delivers basic English language tuition to adult migrants who have been assessed as not having functional English skills. Eligible clients have a legal entitlement of up to 510 hours of English tuition (Richmond, 2011). Learning English is one of the most important steps that non-English speaking people can take towards full participation in Australian society. In the modern world of industrial restructuring, acquisition of English language skills is increasingly important for employment prospects as well as being necessary to avoid the social isolation that can arise from the migration experience (DIAC, 2012).

#### *4.1.2. Settlement Grants Program*

The SGP was introduced to provide support services to refugees and migrants after being in Australia for six months to five years, particularly with clients that hold relevant visas. The aim of the SGP is to deliver services which assist eligible clients to become self-reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival. The funding priorities of the SGP are informed by an annual assessment of settlement needs and through consideration of the statistical data. This approach ensures that services provided

through the SGP are targeted towards those communities and locations in greatest need of settlement assistance, responsive to changing settlement patterns and needs (DIAC, 2012).

#### *4.1.3. Humanitarian Settlement Services*

The Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program assists humanitarian clients in their early settlement period in Australia up to six months. It provides a suite of services delivered through a coordinated case management model. In supporting humanitarian clients to begin their new lives, the HSS program focuses on capacity building; building clients' confidence and ability to participate economically and socially in the wider Australian community; and equips them with the knowledge and skills they will need to access services in the future. Support through the HSS is tailored to individual client needs, including the specific needs of young people (DIAC, 2012).

#### *4.1.4. Complex Case Support services*

The Complex Case Support (CCS) Program delivers specialised and intensive case management services to humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs. The program provides flexible and tailored responses to meet the individual needs of each case. The CCS is specifically targeted at supporting clients whose needs extend beyond the scope of other settlement services, such as the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program and the Settlement Grants Program (SGP). CCS is designed to work in partnership with settlement and mainstream services to address barriers facing clients while settling in Australia. CCS services are delivered by a number of professional organisations across Australia with targeted three main client groups: refugee entrants, Special Humanitarian Program entrants and protection visa holders and persons who hold or have held a Temporary Protection visa. Holders of these visas may be eligible for services for up to five years after their arrival in Australia (DIAC, 2012).

## *4.2 The community's understanding of settlement*

This section is discussing the South Sudanese community's experiences and understanding of settlement. Settlement is understood as a transformation process of helping refugee community groups to settle in a new country. Settlement is the period of adjustment that occurs following a migrant or refugee's arrival in a new country, as they become established and independent in their new society (Richmond, 2011). This means that refugee

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community groups that have been in Australia for over five years are still facing settlement issues for a number of reasons including language and cultural barriers. A refugee community member from South Sudan speaks of difficulties and complexity of defining settlement due to the many issues surrounding settlement

*“Settlement is a broad thing you cannot define it in sentence or in paragraph because it is continuum and endless. There is no yearly stick of measuring the South Sudanese community's needs of settlement as these or that. But what I can say overly is that our people from the South Sudanese community do need orientation and support services. You could see that people are not well oriented and that is why they are struggling with issues related to settlement. I think there is no end to settlement but there is a beginning. If there are no proper services provided, people cannot settle. Social issues can continuously emerge from time to time”* (Samuel)

The above statement is reinforced by the fact that social support can influence immigrants' and refugees' feelings of belonging or isolation. Refugees are facing social issues in their host country, which intensifies problems with integration and their social relations may be either disrupted or de-valued in the host country. Being an immigrant or refugee can impact on each community member's role, expectations, and can increase conflicting values within families. For refugees, social support services enable them to access information and services in the host society, and help them maintain a link with their homeland if they are well supported (Stewart et al, 2008).

*“I think settlement is when you are successful in new life or in new country. It is enabling, integrating people and I think the aim is to enable people or to allow people to reach a point where they can be self-sufficient and well integrated in community. It is very much about understanding system of new culture in new country, navigating yourself to know the ways of life in new environment and stimulating in new culture. I don't think that settlement is about taking someone's life comprehensively. It is about enabling someone; provides knowledge, skills and opportunity to be able to help them self within certain community”* (Monica)

The settlement period is a difficult time for refugee community groups in many ways and can be a dramatic experience for families and individuals. This period requires sufficient support services for refugee community groups because of constant social issues striking refugee families and individuals, including financial hardship, family breakdown,

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intergeneration conflict, social isolation, cultural shock, home sickness, unemployment and discrimination.

*“My parents were overwhelmed by many responsibilities with children and financial pressure. In community generally, people who are older are facing many challenges of because of the responsibilities and things that they wanted to do but could not do because of language barrier. For example they could not get jobs to help themselves and they only depended on welfare payment. They could not help their relatives and family members who were left overseas. It is so difficult and frustrating to people who do not understand English as they are unable to help themselves” (Adeng)*

Parents and young people appeared to experiencing settlement issues differently, perhaps parents or adults tend to have higher expectations of wanting to get jobs and earn money as quick as possible to support their family members and relatives either in Australia or overseas. Young people tend to have less responsibility and expectations of getting jobs because they are young. But the reality is that adults' high expectation of getting jobs within a short time of settlement is unachievable due to many barriers. For example getting a job is a challenging process for someone who has a very little or no English. The process of getting a job is very competitive in Australia; people with low English level cannot get jobs in a competing process.

*“My experience was difficult. There were many challenging things that we faced in between. My family was struggling to get things rights in Australia including learning language. Yet we were hammered by culture shock, home sick and social isolation. There were also discrimination attitudes that we faced from here and there at different places” (John).*

Beside the common settlement issues facing families from the South Sudanese refugee community, parents are facing difficulties in raising children in two different cultures. Young people have some familiarity with Australia's systems and are receptive to Australia's lifestyle. However, parents are still holding their traditional and cultural ways of parenting in South Sudan, which is completely different to Australia's way of parenting. Parenting is one of the challenges of arriving in a new country. In the South Sudanese expression, “parenting in new culture is not a glass of water to drink” - meaning this is not an easy task and cannot be underestimated when working with refugee communities.

*“We live in a country where young people see their ways and young people tend to be smarter than parents and parents are still holding traditional parenting style. This is one*



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*of the causes of family conflict. Family can easily breakdown as a result of continuous tension and distressing situation if there is no understanding*" (Monica).

### *4.3 Lack of continuing support services after five years for refugee communities*

The Australian government funds settlement services agencies to deliver settlement support services to newly arrived refugee families and individuals. Agencies are mandated by the government to work with refugee community groups and individuals by delivering casework, community development, orientation, advocacy, housing and accommodation and so on, depending on the needs of newly arrived clients. However, these settlement support services are delivered within a specified timeframe of refugees' arrival. For example, refugee families and individuals that come under special humanitarian considerations are eligible to receive six to twelve months settlement support services. Also Settlement Grants Program (SGP) is another program that is funded by the Australian government to help refugee families and individuals who have been in Australia less than five years. When refugee families and individuals have been in Australia over five years, they are not eligible for settlement support services. This is often hard for families and individuals that have past the five years mark and are still struggling with settlement issues. One of the participants speaks of her family not been supported by social workers from agencies while struggling with housing issues.

*"I think we had bad settlement experiences when we came here, we didn't have social worker to help us. We did things alone, we struggled to get government housing which I think everyone who is new struggles to get and to make matters worse we are still struggling to get government housing. We are already six years in Australia which means we cannot receive any services in settlement area. But the ironic part is that we have not received any services or any help at all from the start"* (Monica)

Refugee community groups that are struggling with settlement issues require intensive support services including community development initiatives. "Samuel" speaks of the need of active engagement for refugee families based on their needs. *"I think organisations fail to engage refugee community groups actively to address their needs through community development group. There is lack of accountability; organisations should have accountable to newly arrived community groups. Although there is this notion of helping refugee*

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*community groups to settle. Sometimes, refugee families don't get enough support as much as family's needs are concerned"* (Samuel).

#### 4.4 Language and Education

This section discusses language difficulty and settlement support education services provided by the Adult Migrants Education Program (AMEP). Refugee community groups that come from non-English countries and settled in English-speaking countries are constantly faced with language difficulties. It is not easy for adults with many other responsibilities to learn the language quickly. It takes time for refugee adult groups to learn English and to understand the system fully. People need to be supported to improve their levels of education in literacy and numeracy as they are crucial for employability (DIAC, 2012). The problem is that newly arrived refugee members and migrants are only eligible to take free English lessons for 510 hours provided by the AMEP. Extending refugees' learning support services is important to improve their English skills in writing and in communication. Education services provided by AMEP is helping newly arrived refugees and migrants to learn English but this learning support services is only provided within specific timeframe of up to 510 hours on arrival. One of the participants has indicated that 510 hours is not enough for community members from South Sudanese to learn English.

*"510 hours for refugees' education support is not realistic, especially for those who come from a non-English background and oral culture such as south Sudanese group. In South Sudan, people never even learn how write and read in their own language. It is challenging for them. I do think that it is not good idea to classify people in one boat by making them learn English within 510 hours. Learning is depended on personal basis; some people require more or less hours to learn."* (Monica).

#### 4.5 Mistakes made by Community Services Organisations

This section is discussing some mistakes made by organisations when working with refugee communities. These mistakes include a lack of partnership with refugee community groups, over-consultation on small projects and inadequate support services due limited resources. During interviews, South Sudanese community members stated that service providers only consult community members for projects' endorsement and when it comes to implementation; the community is not considered in the delivery process on how the project

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can best meet the needs of refugee communities. This lack of partnership and over consultation creates mistrust between organisations and refugee communities.

*“Community has been over consulted in many projects but not enough services coming back to community based on the consultation. This is problem with agencies; they become guiding and gatekeepers to the community in which community has no direct contact with government. In my view, agencies should be checked by the government and community to ensure that they are accountable to deliver services in right way. There is no accountability”* (Samuel).

According to the South Sudanese refugee community, people are fully aware of issues facing them at grassroots level but it appears that projects that are designed from top-down approach are not meeting the needs of disadvantaged community groups. The South Sudanese refugee community members stated that some organisations are using a top down approach with the refugee community groups, and some are engaging young people well in a platform of partnership and participation.

*“I think there is top down approach within organisations in regards to their work with community. Some projects are designed for community without consultation and claim that they are helping community. I think it is not helpful enough to people, it is very disempowering to people. However, there are some organisations that are doing good jobs by engaging young people in a platform of participation and showcase of skills, which is very much different from writing up projects for someone who does not know how to do projects. This may not work for everyone. I think settlement services should be partnership between community groups and organisations rather than top-down”* (Adeng)

As a result of over consultation and lack of partnership, community members felt that there is no need to participate in consultation since nothing is going to come back to the community. One of the participants that participated in this research stated that she had enough experiences with organisations in relation to consultation; and that she cannot be motivated anymore to participate in them. Paul Atem suggests that social institutions should attend to the needs of disadvantaged refugees and migrants as part of a broader plan to address social exclusion (Atem 2008). This view is shared by the South Sudanese refugee community who want agencies to partner with them in order to address pressing community issues including housing and employment.

*“I have many consultations that I can't be bothered anymore. I don't see the results of those consultations and I don't how they change and what changes has been brought by consultations. Some of the programs are brought to South Sudanese refugee community while designed from A to Z, community knows that they are not going to change anything, what is the point of bringing such program to community or what is the point of consultations since everything is not going change and there is no impact what so ever of structuring or restructures. So I felt over consulted but I like idea of consultation. But I also think it is hard to consult, it is hard job to do and that why organisations bypass it” (Monica).*

#### 4.6 Unemployment

The employment topic is one of the critical themes that came up frequently during interviews. This section is discussing the employment challenges and difficulties facing the South Sudanese community members in getting work. Employment is an important part of supporting refugee communities to settle better in a new environment. When people earn money or have a stable income, it reduces the stress of financial problems and when people get employment, they feel accepted and respected in society. Refugee communities usually struggle with many social issues that affect their ability to secure employment in their new country (DIAC, 2012). The South Sudanese community is one of the groups of refugee communities facing social issues and isolation in the employment area.

*“Getting employed is very important. Its means lots, you integrate easily by understanding system and cultures by having other people work with you. People need employment, but it seems to be hard for many refugee groups particularly we South Sudanese community members in Melbourne” (John).*

Getting employment is essential; it is critical for material welfare and identity. It is clear that many refugee people from an African background find it difficult to gain employment since they have no locally acquired skills and experience. However, some of the problems are related to lack of skills but relate to racial discrimination. It plays a role in keeping Africans unemployed or underemployed, even when they have got Australian qualifications (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

*Discriminating people not to have jobs is disempowering and this makes people to depend their lives on government's welfare benefits. It is not good enough for someone who wanted work and get out of welfare dependency. Many young people are looking for jobs but*

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*no way for them gets jobs quick, it is frustrating and stressful to attend many interviews with no luck or applying for many jobs and no call for interview. This is a real situation for the South Sudanese in Australia” (Monica).*

The unemployment problem is associated with several factors including limited schooling and discriminatory attitudes in workplaces. People from refugee backgrounds are often confronted by difficulties in the labour market which cannot be explained alone by poor English language skills, occupational skill deficiencies or the recentness of their arrival. Refugees face greater adjustment problems in settlement, possibly as a direct consequence of the traumatic events leading to their arrival. Refugees from African backgrounds are suffering from excessive unemployment, inactivity, non-employment, disguised unemployment and under-employment (Atem 2008).

Refugee communities are dealing with complex issues during the settlement period. The South Sudanese people seem to be losing their confidence and ability to look for suitable jobs because of discriminatory attitudes of employers. The community's situation has constantly deteriorated due to a lack of support provided from settlement organisations. As a result of people losing hope, they remain helpless and struggle with unemployment issues. There are many young people who are looking for jobs but it is difficult to get jobs because of high competition and the lack of available jobs in the market. Furthermore, unemployed parents cannot have a choice about where to live and where to educate their children as lack of financial stability is daunting for refugee families who are depending on welfare payments. Paul Atem argues that racial discrimination is one of the major impediments in gaining employment as some employers tend to dislike hiring black Africans in their workplaces (Atem 2008)

#### *4.7 Housing*

Getting affordable housing for families of a larger size is stressful and challenging process in many parts of Australia. The Australian government is trying hard to address the housing shortage but a lack of resources to build affordable housing for everyone has made it hard for the government to address housing and homelessness in some cases. Families from refugee communities struggle to get accommodation or housing because of the number children in the family; two or three bedroom flats or houses cannot accommodate the family in such situations (Atem 2009). On top of this, landlords are fearful to rent their properties to

families with many children because of the likelihood of property damage. This makes it harder for families with many children to be accepted into private renting. It is widely acknowledged that people of African backgrounds encounter significant difficulties accessing adequate and appropriate housing in Australia. These difficulties need to be understood so that strategies can be developed to assist African Australian families meet their accommodation needs. It is also necessary to explore structural and systemic practices that prevent African Australians accessing suitable accommodation (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

Access to appropriate and affordable housing is a very important and is a fundamental human right (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009). Getting affordable accommodation is one of the issues facing unemployed families from the South Sudanese community. During their settlement period, families have been struggling to find suitable accommodation for their family. "John" speaks of getting a house for a single mother with low income and a number of children as difficult.

*"Getting house for single mother with low income and number of young children is very difficult in Australia particular with real estate agents. Families are denied based on their incomes and number of children they have, this made difficult for many families from South Sudanese community to access private rents. It is also difficult to get government housing due to long waiting list and as well as four to five bedroom are rare to get too with government's houses"* (John).

The above mentioned statement is reinforced by research done on housing barriers facing African migrants in Australia. Research argues that African migrants in Australia are facing difficulties in the housing sector due to their larger family size, lack of personal transport; lack of financial and social capital; racial discrimination; limited English language skills and lack of knowledge in dealing with public and private sectors. The traditional family structure of African migrants appears to be differed from other migrant groups in Australia. Africans often have larger family sizes than those of non-African households making the traditional Australian housing designs not suitable to meet the African migrants' housing needs (Atem 2009)

As a resulted of having affordability issues with accommodation and financial hardship, families are forced to live in high rise accommodations that are not suitable for raising children. The South Sudanese families that live in high-rise buildings are there

because they cannot afford to pay the market rent of houses. Families with children are fearful that the wrong group will influence their children (Atem 2009). The South Sudanese refugee community would ideally like to be placed in suburbs where accommodation is affordable and there are amenities such as public transport, public hospitals and schools. Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing. The right to housing is more than simply a right to shelter. It is a right to have somewhere to live that is adequate. Whether housing is adequate depends on a range of factors including legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location, and cultural adequacy (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

#### *4.8 Racism and discrimination*

Australia is a country of many nationalities. Many people that make up Australia's population have an overseas connection in either the first, second or third generations of their family backgrounds, except indigenous-Australians. According to the Australian government policy, Australia is a diverse nation and has embraced multicultural policy in which no one is to be discriminated against in any form. Nevertheless racism and discrimination are still outstanding issues when it comes to newly arrived refugees'. African-Australians want to build their new life and contribute to Australian society but many of these newer arrivals have been confronted by numerous barriers including accessing employment, housing and racial issues (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009).

*“Racism and discrimination is something sensitive to be discussed openly in Australia. You find that the whole institutions completely either ignore intentionally or are uninterested in such issues or they just find it insignificant, yet it is something essential to be addressed as the way you see yourself as an Australian. So I do think racism is a big factor at schools as well as employment sector. At schools for example, there is a number of young people from South Sudanese background that dropout at schools because of racist attitudes toward them. If you talk to young people, some of them will tell you that they are called monkeys at schools, things like that can be constituted as racism. Young people are supposedly to spend 80 per cent of their day at schools, there is no way you can spend such time as a human being in an environment where you feels unsafe, un-respected or treated as you are person who has somewhere to go” (Achol).*

Common barriers faced by African Australians are visible differences, access issues related to English language skills, and local experience in the employment arena. These and many more barriers are often linked to discrimination and barriers maintained by professional bodies (Australia Human Right Commission, 2009). The Australian government's multicultural policy position is that racism and discrimination is unacceptable in Australia. It is unlawful to discriminate against people based on their skin colour, nationality, faith, social status including disability and so on. However, it is one of the sensitive topics that many people do not like to discuss in public and it still exists in many forms. Refugee community groups are experiencing racial attacks and discrimination in different forms including comments made by prominent politicians against refugee community groups. In 2007, the former Minister for Immigration Kevin Andrew publicly announced that African Migrants had failed to integrate into mainstream systems. As a consequence of such comments, media groups including channel 7, 9 and 10 in Melbourne targeted the 'Sudanese' issue and reported negatively on African refugee community groups for their commercial interests (Due, 2008).

As a consequence of such comments from politicians in the media, refugees from the South Sudanese community end up being the victim of discrimination and racial abuse. Atem (2011) argues that African refugees face discrimination related to the Australia's narrow conceptions, which is translated into discrimination in the labour market, health and education issues, a housing crisis and tensions between the community and mediating social agencies.

*"You have these all groups of young people, myself is included who sometimes faces other avenues in which one would feel different forms of discrimination. Sometimes I felt that I'm totally discriminated against and this is also applied to many young people that do go out with me. Yet we have nowhere to go and address our grievances about awful feeling of discrimination"* (Monica).

People can be unsettled in some cases when they are still struggling with feelings of being unsafe, discrimination at workplace, racial comments on the street or from neighbours. For example, a refugee child may arrive home from school feeling unwelcomed at school because of comments made about his or her skin colour. Communities generally feel unsafe in such situations; people want to move to a better location where they would feel welcomed, respected and treated fairly. Families and young people from the South Sudanese community have experienced confronting issues of racism and discrimination. Due (2008) describes



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political representation in Australia as hegemonic with one dominant power since the time of the White Australia policy. This reinforced attitudes of some people who are still holding negative views towards migrants and refugees.

*“My brother was constantly threatened at school which was horrible, eventually we have to move out, and particularly we cannot cope to live there anymore because it was not safe for us. As consequences of living in that area before, my brother is struggling with school. The South Sudanese young people are struggling to find their ways of belonging in of term identity in Australia. This is due to constant issues confronting people in many places, and these issues includes racism and discrimination at workplaces, schools and other public areas” (Monica).*

The experience of discrimination by African immigrants in Australia has been noted by major studies on African settlement in Australia. Some of the literature indicates that racism has a significant impact on health due to stress and has both physiological and social consequences (Due, 2008). At the physiological level, stress has adverse effects on our health and at the social level it reduces our chances in accessing vital resources such as employment, education, housing and recreational amenities. Discrimination and subsequent stress effects depends on other factors including previous experiences, personal resilience and availability of social support. Young men from the South Sudanese community find themselves being constantly threatened by police and being called ‘gang groups’ because they are walking in a group. In the South Sudanese culture, it is common to travel in groups as young men and young women as part of socialisation. This part of culture is not being understood in many contexts; it is why many of these young men are being stopped randomly by police (Mungai, 2008).

#### *4.9 Helps received from friends and relatives*

This section discusses the help provided by family members who had already lived in Australia. Australia’s diversity and multi-linguistics has helped many newly arrived refugee groups. People often help families and individual members from their community background. It helps government and settlement agencies by not placing too much attention to those newly arrived members who are getting services and supports from their community members. Agencies and governments can pay attention to those who have no support and community connection by providing intensive support services to address their settlement needs. This community spirit is not acknowledged widely in some written materials but it is

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an excellent spirit of community that needs to be promoted as part of community voluntarism. The South Sudanese community is a communal community; friends and relatives play enormous roles in supporting newly arrived members during their arrivals. Participants indicated that help from friends and relatives makes their lives a little bit easier when they first arrived in Australia.

*“First, when we came here in Australia we had family friends that met us and helped us. They showed us places, shopping centres, Centrelink and banks. It has become harder for me later on when I moved into my own house in a place where I did not know anybody. I was with my kids and we were not aware of places, shopping centre, schools and public transport place. It was a little bit struggling for me. Struggling to go shopping and while pushing a pram, I had to use public busses. You know it is really hard in Australia to ask people in public when you don't know things or don't understanding things. You look silly and stupid to some people when you ask them. Some people can easily refuse by not talking to you when you try to probe them; people mind their ways quickly to avoid being asked by strangers”* (Achol).

#### *4.10 Comparison of the settlement experiences.*

This section compares the settlement experiences of the South Sudanese refugee community before they left South Sudan and their experiences in Australia as they are settling. Based on my findings, the following are comparable experiences. One participant speaks about settlement issues facing the South Sudanese community in Australia and admits that Australia is best place to live, and that settlement in Australia cannot be compared with settlement experiences in African countries.

*“There is no comparison between the settlement experiences in Australia and those faced by refugees in refugee camps. I think there was not much of a settlement experience in Kenya really. It was much more a process of coping if there is any. In refugee camps in Kenya, the UN did a job of trying to make us survive through provision of food, medical care, primary and secondary education which we all get here in Australia. Australia is a country of resources and facilities. Organisations are much more diverse, they target various programs and much better equipped than organisations in refugee camps. But there is always all new challenges and new settling in a new country which is horrible for people if they are not well prepared to face realities”* (Monica).

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From the participants' point of view, Australia is a place with many opportunities including education which the South Sudanese refugee group were deprived of when they were in refugee camps in Egypt, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia.

*“The life was very difficult for us when we were in refugee camps compared to Australia. There were no jobs and other services we have here in Australia, I think Australia is a better place to live in”* (Adeng).

*“Australia is a best place with many opportunities such as education. It is cannot be compared with other places in Africa such as Egypt. In Egypt, it is also hard for foreigners to get jobs. Australian is the best country for me”* (John).

One participant speaks of his settlement experience in New Zealand, he see different approach with the New Zealand way of receiving refugees.

*“I had opportunity of going to New Zealand, my settlement experiences is very different to Australia. The reception in New Zealand is very strong; people are receipted and later on handing over to local council to support them and provide local services. I think reception in Australia need to be well coordinated with local council to encourage local community members to support refugee groups including getting jobs in local council”* (Samuel).

#### *4.11 Suggestions for improving the settlement services for refugee community groups*

This section discusses some recommendations and suggestions made by participants on how things could be improved for refugee communities to make it easier for refugees to access services including employment opportunities. Community groups always struggle to understand the system because of bureaucracy. Participants made recommendations, including the regular checking of settlement policy as well as making the bureaucratic system easier for refugee communities to access services by forging partnerships between settlement services organisations and refugee community groups. There is a need for a regular review of settlement policy to meet the needs of refugee groups as settlement patterns change from region to region and from time to time based on conflict affected areas. Community members from the South Sudanese refugee realise that bureaucracy becomes problematic for them and denies many members access services.

*“I think the problem with organisations that are funded to provide settlement services, there is too much bureaucracy. For someone whose is new in this country it makes life very hard. There is so much process of referrals. You go to organisation, the refer you to*

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*another organisation and from there to another one. It's so multi-layered for someone who is new and it takes a lot of time to contact and be referred to one organisation and then to other one. You get frustrated and you end up being like not being provided with any good services. I think organisations that provide settlement services need to understand that people from different backgrounds have different needs and different target groups. I think settlement policies have not shifted from that time of 1950s, the organisations that provide settlement services has not shifted" (Monica).*

Refugee community members with low English skill need more hours of learning beyond 510 hours until a person is ready to go to work or move to higher level of learning.

*"As people face difficulties in language, it will be good for government to provide more hours of learning. 510 hours are not enough for a person who had never been to school to learn English in such a short period of time. People can be more productive when they have learned English well" (Samuel)*

There is a great need for refugee communities to be involved in partnerships with government agencies. "Monica" speaks of a comprehensive understanding of issues facing refugee community groups through working together with community groups.

*"I think there is a need for people to move into partnerships of working with newly emerged community groups that are very vulnerable in Australia. The partnerships should bring into comprehensive programs to better ways of understanding how settlement issues impacted on the refugees' issues in their lives. For example issues such family violence can affect child's education or employment for example it's affected the possibilities of how parents could support their children at schools and sporting for example, whether parents could afford to pay for their child or children to join sporting activities. I think there is a need for comprehensive understanding of social issues, the short consultation of 30 minutes is not enough to capture all social issues that are facing people" (Monica).*

Refugee community groups such as the South Sudanese community require a great deal of support from organisations that provide settlement services, without stereotyping as a community with many problems. The refugee community needs support services through a community empowering process, including orientation, raising awareness about laws, child rearing in a new culture, and health and domestic violence issues.

*"Community organisations need to be careful with the way they categorise community groups and the ways they write their projects. I mean stereotyping refugee community groups; it is not helpful at all. It just makes community like us (South Sudanese community) as violence and issues fronted community. For example, organisation would write to*

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*government recommending that there are these issues in South Sudanese community such as girls being in prostitution, domestic violence, gangers and etcetera. This is bad to stereotype people based on individual's action" (Samuel).*

Settlement issues are very complex for refugee communities that come from a non-English speaking background. Settlement policy and services must be reviewed based on refugee groups and their situation. For example, refugee groups from developed regions do not need intensive settlement support services compared to those refugee groups that come from developing countries.

*"The problem is that we are in a tough situation; we are in system which was created when people from African background were not in minds. The system of any country is usually created with a culture of people in that country. This is not racist thing or discrimination; it is how the system works in any country. For example South Sudan, there are some things that Australians people could not understand. For example we marry with dowries, cows. People in Australia cannot cope with system if they were to be placed in such situation" (John).*

### 10.12. Summary

The South Sudanese community are overwhelmed by settlement issues. Many people from this community have very little or no English and do not understand western systems; their ability to structure their day-to-day life is confounded by settlement issues. Some tend to live in crisis and a confused state of not knowing what to do the next day. Some do not even remember appointments for themselves or their children as a result of these settlement difficulties, the sense of community is lost and young people become confused and disengaged from their families. Family relationships are under enormous tension and threat due to many unsettled issues surrounding families and individuals within the community as a result of settlement difficulties. The situation is worse compared to the sense of community and family bond that this South Sudanese community had before their arrival to Australia. The community is losing social connection as a result of settlement issues that has impacted on an individual's ability and their family functioning. The majority of this group came with no experience of living in cities. Finally, many South Sudanese are from rural areas and they had no idea or past experience about banks, government departments or dealing with real estate agencies. They never rented houses in cities, paid bills, or worked in corporate and

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bureaucratic sectors. Life in a city is a new life for many families and individuals that were living in a village and refugee camps prior to their arrival in Australia.

## Chapter Five: Limitations and Conclusion

There were some limitations and challenges in this study of refugees' settlement experiences. Some participants were not sure where to start in talking about the settlement experience as it related to their own experiences. For instance, there was silence and hesitation from participants particularly in sharing their settlement experiences but after explanation from a principal researcher, participants became confident and shared their settlement experiences and community issues. The second problem is noted in this research was that the South Sudanese have been over-researched on different projects; therefore the community appeared to be resentful to committing to another research project. Community members were very careful about their commitment to do research which is understandable from a principal researcher's point of view. There was also a lack of definition of settlement from the South Sudanese community. The South Sudanese community is a cultural community and settlement issues are sensitive to some people within that community. The researcher was mindful of culture sensitivity and was extra careful during the recruitment process. The third problem was that it appeared that the South Sudanese community has been overwhelmed with settlement challenges, which left them no room to reflect on the positive stories of settlement in Australia. There are many positive stories of settlement services and successes in the western suburbs of Melbourne that were not discussed in this research.

### *5.1 Conclusion*

This research found some significant gaps between the South Sudanese refugee community's perspective of settlement and the Australian government's settlement policy. First, the community raised concerns about the provision of short-term support services. The community believes that their challenges cannot be addressed within five years. A five year period is not sufficient for many refugee families and young people to address their settlement issues. In the current settlement policy, community agencies that specialise in delivering settlement services are contracted by the government to deliver settlement support services from the first day of arrival up to five years. After this period of five years, refugees are expected to find their own way of addressing issues, either by accessing mainstream

services or establishing their own support services that are very rare for a vulnerable community to do without sufficient resources.

There are many issues that blocked refugee communities accessing mainstream community services. These issues include racism and discrimination that people choose not to take about openly and yet it is something that exists in many levels. A second issue is a lack of appropriate cultural services from the mainstream agencies, leading to misunderstanding between clients from refugee community groups and mainstream agencies. Refugee families and individuals find it difficult to cope with their settlement issues. Housing, unemployment, language barriers and discrimination are overriding issues. There is also a concern that 510 hours of learning English is not enough for refugee groups from a non-English background to acquire adequate English skills. People cannot master the English language within such a short period of time according to the South Sudanese refugee community. Some people who have no education background from their previous countries end up finishing their free 510 hours within a very short time without gaining sufficient English skill.

The community also identified a lack of sufficient engagement between refugee community groups and settlement services agencies due to insufficient resources. Furthermore, the refugee community find it difficult to get employment due to low English proficiency, lack of skills in labour as well as discrimination in workforces that affected refugee members with qualifications. Large families are similarly struggling to find suitable homes and accommodation as most houses built in Australia are mainly between two and four bedrooms. Settlement challenges cannot be underestimated; refugee community groups need enormous support services to rectify their settlement issues and to help them settle better in the mainstream community.

The settlement period can be a difficult time for refugee families and individuals. Therefore, without a good connection between local services and local people, refugee families and individuals can be struck by social isolation, feelings of confusion and helplessness due to a lack of understanding as well as direction. Even when there is support and connection, people still struggle with feelings of homesickness, isolation, culture shock, unemployment and discrimination. Refugee community groups like the South Sudanese community that came from a long civil war background require time for rehabilitation because people that come from such situations are usually deprived of social skills. Ideally,

refugee communities are looking for more support to help them address settlement issues. It is extremely frustrating for refugee families and young people to live in crisis and instability in relation to unemployment as well as accommodation. This research identified significant settlement challenges facing the South Sudanese community and these include: unemployment, housing issues, language barriers, trauma issues, general health issues and discrimination. People's ability to start a new life and integrate successfully into the mainstream community is impeded by these settlement issues.

The South Sudanese refugee community are very much a disadvantaged group due to the lack of resources and support services to help families and young people address their settlement issues. Some of these families and young people have experienced difficult issues prior to their arrival in Australia. Young people have trouble coping with the education system in Australia because many of these young people arrived in Australia without basic education from overseas due to a fact that there was no stability in refugee camps for education. Parents/adults are also struggling with many issues; some find it hard to get jobs or to understand the existing bureaucracy system in Australia. The quality of their lives is critically endangered by common settlement issues, namely language barriers, unemployment, discrimination, financial hardship, social isolation, stereotyping, housing issues and difficulties in parenting children in a new culture.

## *5.2. Recommendations*

As a result of this thesis's findings of settlement issues facing the South Sudanese community in the western suburbs of Melbourne, the author is recommending that refugees' needs and issues must be understood differently based on their levels of education obtained in their previous countries of origin, time spend in refugee camps and types of services provided in particular camps. Services need to improve in areas of employment, racism and discrimination, social isolation as well as early intervention services by boosting/creating cultural appropriate services to help community in addressing past trauma issues and settlement issues in a way that is appropriate to their culture and experiences.

There is also a need of effective intervention strategies and alternative engagement from the government and services providers that works with the South Sudanese refugee community. Without effective intervention strategies and alternative engagement, there is going to be continued risks and challenges facing families and individual members in



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Australia regardless of how long this community spends in Australia. Some of the risks facing members of the community include problems that are interrelated like unemployment and the continual dependence on social security support as main source of income for families. Social isolation and the effects of discrimination and racism can affect people's abilities and can make them vulnerable throughout their lives which results in the cumulative effect of being economically and socially excluded from Australia's mainstream society.

There are some important steps that need to be taken seriously by the government when settling refugee community groups in the mainstream community. First, settlement can be successful when there is a strong connection between refugee community groups and local community groups. Therefore, it is vital that refugee community groups are helped through connection with local services and to local people. The second step is to create awareness and educate the local community to avoid some tensions and prejudicial ideas of why refugee families are settled in particular local area. There is also a need to inform the local community to accept refugee families in their neighbour centres, schools and workplaces without discrimination and negative stereotyping.

This research of the South Sudanese community found gaps between the South Sudanese refugee community's experiences and understanding of settlement timeframes and the Australia government's settlement policy. According to the Australian government's settlement policy, refugee community groups are expected to address their settlement issues and settle within a period of five years (DIAC, 2012).

This means that only refugee families and individuals that have been in Australia less than five years are eligible for settlement support services. However, the majority of refugee community groups are still seeking settlement support services beyond five years. There is also a lack of understanding of the complexity of settlement issues in the Australia's mainstream society. The complexity of settlement issues is well understood by refugee community groups based on common settlement issues facing families and individuals. The differences between refugee communities practice and the Australian government's settlement policy appeared to be on the issue of long-term support services beyond five years and a limited support services up to five years.

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## 5.4 Appendices

### *A-List of abbreviations and acronym*

UNHCR-United Nations High Commission for Refugees

VFST- Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

SGP –Settlement Grant program

AMEP –Adult Migrant Program

CCS-complexes Case Support

HSS- Humanitarian Support Services

UN-United Nations

IDP-Internal Displaced people

### **B- Information to participants involved in research**

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project titled: 'A study of the South Sudanese refugees' perspectives of settlement in the western suburbs of Melbourne'. This project is being conducted by William Abur, a student studying Master of International Community Development at Victoria University, supervised by Dr Julie Fletcher of the School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Victoria University..

Project explanation

The aim of this study is to investigate South Sudanese perspectives on what settlement means and their experiences of settlement issues, comparing these meanings with the definitions provided by Australian government and policy makers. This piece of research is hoping to explore community knowledge and understanding of settlement issues and definitions of settlement based on community perspectives. The definitions will be compared with the Australian government's definitions of settlement and policy.

What will I be asked to do?

Participants will be asked to complete a face-to-face in-depth interview about their settlement experience in Australia, which will be audio recorded. The interview is anticipated to take 60 minutes.

What will I gain from participating?

Participants will contribute to an emerging body of knowledge relating to the definitions of settlement and understanding of settlement issues. The stories provided by you will provide valuable insight and clear understanding settlement issues and definitions, which may help to

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shape government's policy and find better ways of delivering settlement services to new generations of refugees and migrants.

How will the information I give be used?

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The information you provide will be treated with integrity and respect. The raw data will be stored in a safe place by the principle investigator, and can only be accessed and used by the two investigators involved in the project. The analysed data will contribute to a minor thesis and journal article.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

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It is safe to participate in this study. We acknowledge that during the course of the interview you may recall difficult memories and experiences which may be potentially distressing. You could inform the researcher Mr William Abur whenever you feel uncomfortable with the interview. We could take breaks or you could fully withdraw from the interview at any time. If you experience any distress as a result of the interview, a free counselling session could be arranged for you at the School of Social Sciences and Psychology.

How will this project be conducted?

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The research will be conducted using a face-to-face in-depth, recorded interview. The interviews will be carried out in a place of your choice. Interview responses will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. Topics of the interviews will be coded for key themes. The information provided by the participants will be treated in confidence. The names and identifying details of the participants will not be disclosed in the thesis and journal article.

Who is conducting the study?

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The study is being conducted by Mr William Abur and Dr Julie Fletcher of Victoria University.

The Student Researchers is:

William Abur

Student studying Master of International Community Development at Victoria University

Contact: 0434516127 or email: [William.abur@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:William.abur@live.vu.edu.au)

Chief Investigator/ supervisor:

Dr Julie Fletcher

School of Social Sciences and Psychology

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[Julie.Fletcher@vu.edu.au](mailto:Julie.Fletcher@vu.edu.au)

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Keywords: South Sudanese, refugees, experiences, settlement, understanding, western suburbs of Melbourne

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Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Principal Researcher listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics and Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

## C- Consent form for participants involved in research

### **Information to participants:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study of the South Sudanese refugees' perspectives of settlement in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The aim and objective of this study is to investigate the South Sudanese perspective of settlement meanings and experiences of settlement issues, and compare these meanings with the definitions provided by Australian government and policy makers. This piece of research is hoping to explore community knowledge of understanding settlement issues and definitions of settlement based on community perspectives. The definitions will be compared with the Australia government's definitions of settlement and policy.

You are asked to participate in an in-depth face to face interview, which contains about twelve key open-ended questions. The whole interview will take approximately 60 minutes. You are given the opportunity to read and understand the interview questions before agreeing to participate in the study. The interview is straight forward and there are no anticipated risks connected with the interview process.

Data collected from the interview will be kept in confidence by the researchers. However you have been informed, and are aware that your information will be documented and presented in minor thesis and journal articles without identifying your name and contact details.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, you aware of your right to withdraw from the interview at any time if you choose not to proceed with the project.

### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

Certify that I am at least 18 years old\* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: a study of the South Sudanese refugees' perspectives of settlement in the western suburbs of Melbourne being conducted at Victoria University by William Abur.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: William Abur and that I freely consent to participation in an in-depth interviewed for approximately 60 minutes.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.



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I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: -----

Date: -----

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher William Abur 0434516127 or email: [William.abur@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:William.abur@live.vu.edu.au) If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics & Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

Contact person for counselling session.

Dr Romana Morda – Counselling Psychologist

Phone: 9919 5223 email: [romana.morda@vu.edu.au](mailto:romana.morda@vu.edu.au)

[\*please note: Where the participant/s are aged under 18, separate parental consent is required; where the participant/s are unable to answer for themselves due to mental illness or disability, parental or guardian consent may be required.]