

Experiences of African Immigrants in Edmonton

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Immigration and Settlement Learning Day: Mobilizing Knowledge to Inspire Action

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Outline

- ❑ Context
- ❑ Concerns
- ❑ Objective of study
- ❑ Study methodology

Findings

- ❑ Demographics
- ❑ Arrival in Canada/Edmonton
- ❑ Reasons for coming
- ❑ Transitioning to
 - ❑ Canadian institutions
 - ❑ Challenges
 - ❑ Strategies

Way forward

Vote of Thanks

Context: Immigration in Canada



- ❑ Immigration is important to Canada's population growth
- ❑ There is an increase in the number of visible minorities:
 - ❑ Due to reforms in immigration policy in the 1960s
 - ❑ From Europeans to a Point-based System, on skills

Context: Immigrants from Africa

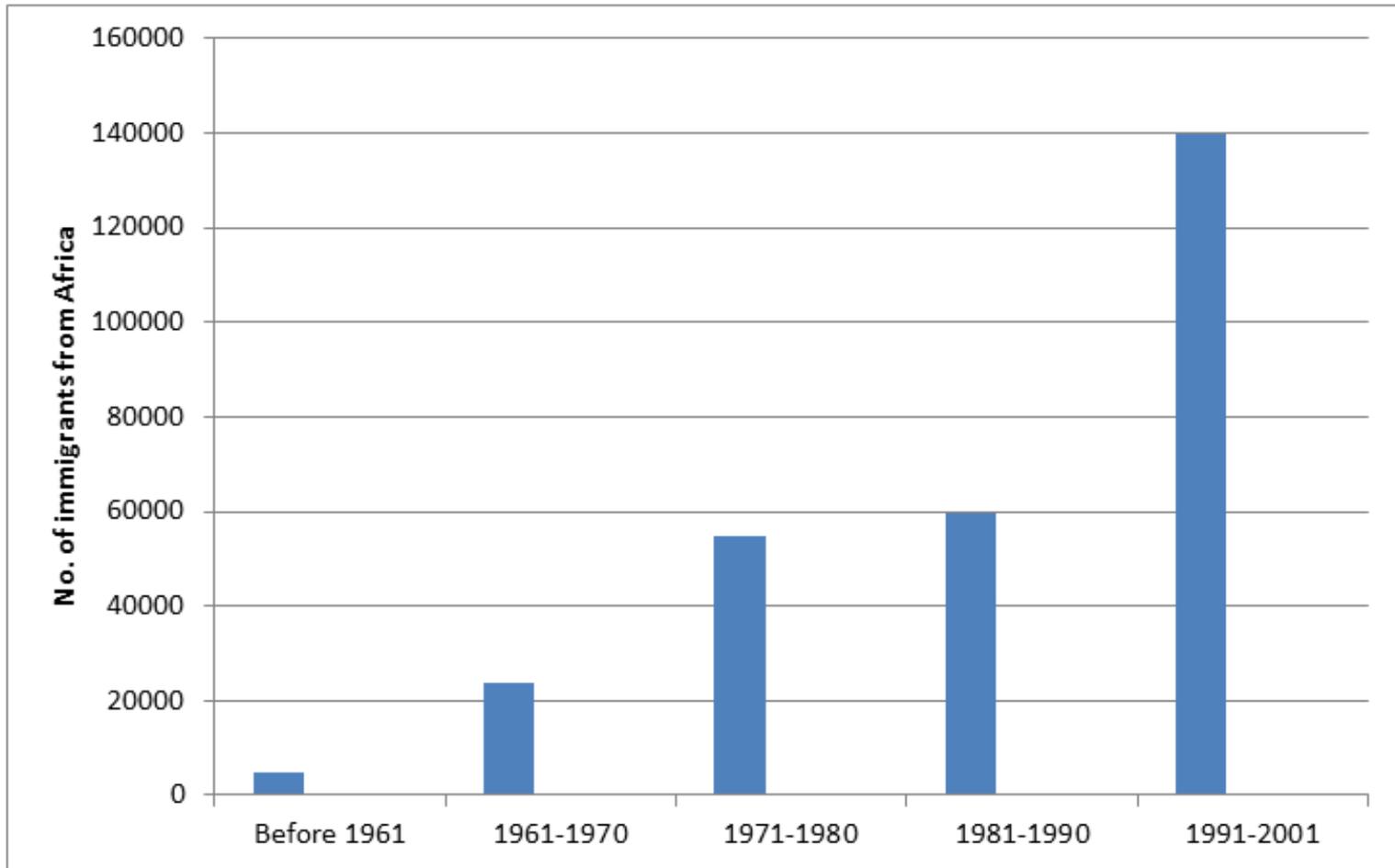


- ❑ An upward trend on number of immigrants from Africa
- ❑ Black people are third largest visible minority group
- ❑ Median age of Black immigrants, 29.5 years in 2011
- ❑ 2006-2011, **12.5%** of Newcomers arrived from Africa

Context: No. of immigrants from Africa

Year and numbers to Canada

I



Context: Africa, a continent of diversity



- ❑ Land size = 30,221, 532 km²
- ❑ 1.1 Billion people
- ❑ 54+ countries
- ❑ Over 2000 ethnicities/languages
 - ❑ The most multilingual in the world

Concerns

Immigrants are **highly educated** and **skilled**, yet

Black people in Canada are:

- ❑ Over represented in number of **refugees**, those living in **poverty** and in **poor health**
- ❑ Incomes of immigrants have **declined** over time
- ❑ Immigrant Effect – decline in health over time
- ❑ New phenomenon of **seniors** from Africa
- ❑ Black immigrants viewed as **homogenous** group, yet they are diverse

Example of decline of immigrant incomes

...over time

Table 16: Average Total Income by Immigrant Status, Gender, and Period of Immigration, Canada Alberta, and City of Edmonton, 2000

	Canadian male	Canadian female	Albertan male	Albertan female	Edmonton (City) male	Edmonton (City) female
Canadian-born	\$37,017	\$23,079	\$40,805	\$22,771	\$39,692	\$22,972
Immigrated before 1961	\$40,843	\$23,324	\$40,036	\$22,478	\$38,829	\$22,189
1961-1970	\$45,816	\$26,612	\$48,087	\$25,937	\$45,831	\$25,004
1971-1980	\$43,755	\$27,072	\$45,508	\$25,630	\$42,302	\$24,178
1981-1990	\$33,067	\$22,142	\$33,939	\$20,623	\$31,473	\$19,961
1991-1995	\$27,610	\$18,212	\$28,375	\$16,766	\$27,158	\$16,064
1996-2001	\$24,638	\$14,803	\$26,257	\$14,374	\$22,850	\$13,661

Source: Portraits of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Canada: Regional Comparisons, pp. 138 and 140.

Objectives of the Study



- ❑ Take stock of the immigration of people from Africa to:
 - ❑ Comprehend their experiences, i.e.,
 - ❑ Reasons for coming
 - ❑ What it takes to transition into the Canadian community
 - ❑ Challenges faced and strategies to overcome them

- ❑ **Equip** the Africa Centre & other immigration agencies with relevant information to **design relevant** programs and services, better serve immigrants from Africa

Study methodology



Two stages - review of literature and field study

- ❑ Participant selection criteria:
 - ❑ Adults, gender, regions of Africa, length of stay in Canada

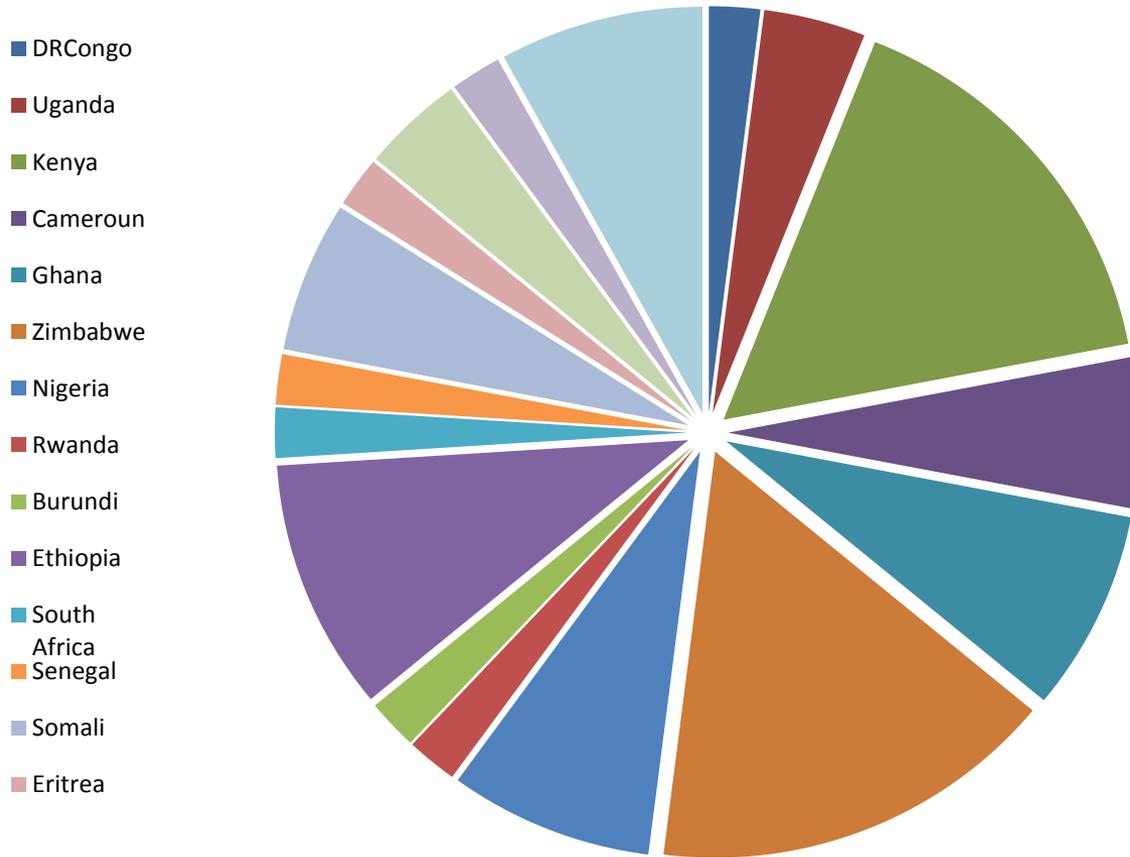
- ❑ Recruitment:
 - ❑ Mailing list from Africa Centre
 - ❑ Participation at community events
 - ❑ Snowball

- ❑ Data collection
 - ❑ Individual interviews
 - ❑ Used an interview guide – open-ended questions
 - ❑ Digitally recorded, listened to for analysis

Findings: Demographic information

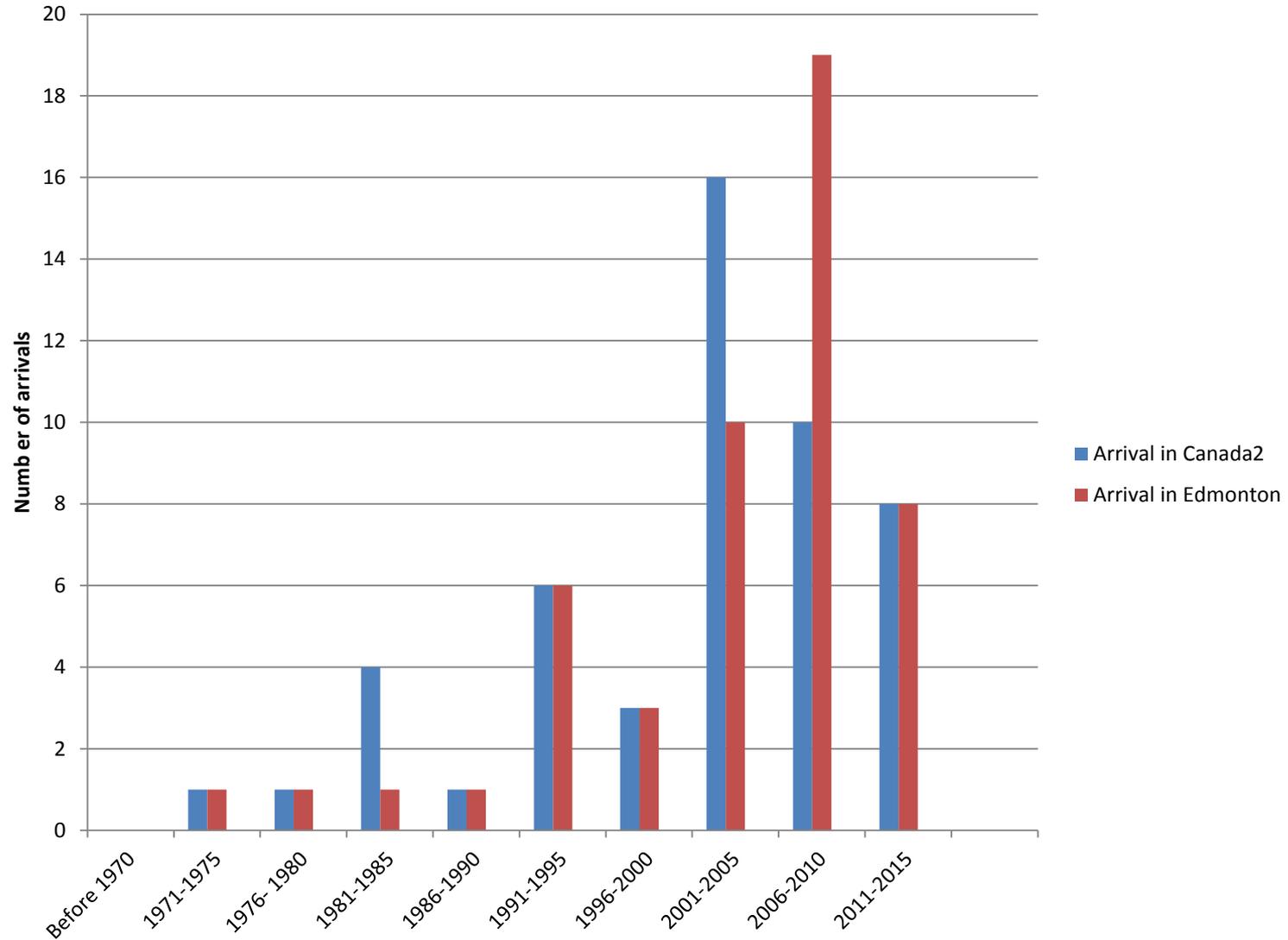
- ❑ Interviewees drawn from **17** countries
- ❑ Interviewed **50** people
- ❑ Gender:
 - ❑ Females 17
 - ❑ Males 33
- ❑ Education:
 - ❑ Diploma to PhD
- ❑ Year of arrival:
 - ❑ 1972 – 2014
- ❑ Languages:
 - ❑ Two to five

Country of origin of study participants



DRCongo	1
Uganda	2
Kenya	8
Cameroun	3
Ghana	4
Zimbabwe	8
Nigeria	4
Rwanda	1
Burundi	1
Ethiopia	5
South Africa	1
Senegal	1
Somali	3
Eritrea	1
Malawi	2
South Sudar	1
Tanzania	4

Arrival in Canada, Edmonton



Reasons for coming to Edmonton

- ❑ Pursue higher education
- ❑ Reunite with family
- ❑ Had friends/family in Edmonton
- ❑ Conflicts/insecurity at home
- ❑ Professional/economic opportunities in Alberta

“After reading in the UN report that Canada was number one in terms of human rights, I knew this would be the right place for my children to grow up” –^{TS023}

“Am sure you know the political situation, so my parents wanted something better for us, opportunity-wise, coming here has opened a lot of opportunities for us” – ^{TS034}

Transitioning into Edmonton

Places where Newcomers visit and identify with the larger community:

- ❑ Place of worship
- ❑ Residential groups
- ❑ Proximity friendships: shared schools, recreation
- ❑ Associations of country of origin
- ❑ Professional groups
- ❑ Welfare committees
- ❑ Celebrations: Canadian or of country of origin

Transitioning...

Level of participation varies:

- ❑ Participate less due to limits in time
- ❑ Participate more to show unity with “country-men”
- ❑ Earlier immigrants participate less

*“Sometimes people are sub-divided in that individuals bring along **divisions from back home**. For example, in countries undergoing conflicts, members who support different factions find it hard to have a united national association in Canada.” – TS041*

*“When people first arrive from Africa, they still have the longing to continue interaction with others from Africa and **talk about home**, but over time, one **widens their networks** and the narrative changes from stories of home to **stories on how to survive**, ...how to get a job, purchase a house, etc.” – TS010*

Interaction with Canadian institutions

Length of stay makes it easier to navigate institutions:

- ❑ Educational
- ❑ Health care
- ❑ Recreation

Newer arrivals interacted less with **health care** and **gym** institutions

*“The school has been very supportive and this is one of the things I like about Edmonton or Canada. They give you the opportunity to **work with teachers** if there are issues, ...we try to work with teachers to the benefit of all.” – TS07*

Interaction with health care

- ❑ Good and uniform to all
- ❑ Gives options, e.g. physician to consult
- ❑ Long wait times
- ❑ Cultural competency and sensitivity – individuals and service providers

*“Where I come from you go to **see a doctor only when you are sick**, If I go to see a doctor just for the sake of it, then you start testing me for cancer, touching my private parts, I will not go back there, I am not sick... have a **social worker to talk with patients** before they go for certain medical procedures.”* - TS010

Interaction with Education

- ❑ School grade placement based on age
- ❑ Lack of uniform criteria to convert outside education to Canadian system
- ❑ Language competency of learners

“For others by the time they arrive here, they look at them and depending on age, they put them in that grade irrespective of what level of education one has.” – TS02

“I think we have an advantage in being from a country that speaks English, I have seen other Africans from countries that do not use English, and they do struggle.” – TS034

Professional certification

Lengthy and costly professional certification process

- ❑ Immigrants abandon their professions
- ❑ However, certification helps bring order and uniformity to a multicultural society

*“Sometimes it is distressing to realize that, although you may think that you **are qualified you cannot practice**. However I also need to say that it is not all doom and gloom in that getting that credentialing and transitioning is good, it really **gets you to orient and succeed...**, our practice back home and here are totally different, and especially in the medical profession where one has to deal with people, which can have legal implications.”* - TS03

Immigrant Vs Newcomer

- ❑ Viewed and treated as Newcomers

*“Even for individuals that are born and bred in Edmonton, people still ask one **where they come from**, implying that you cannot be from here, you must be from somewhere else, mostly based on colour of skin.” - TS049*

- ❑ Inter-generational misunderstandings

- ❑ Loss of cultural practices and language

“Young people are given too many choices by schools, it ends up taking them too long to make decisions on what they want in life. For example, they are told that one can be anything, which makes it hard for the young people to make a choice, unlike back home where parents and teachers are part of the student choice-making process.” - TS010

On becoming a Senior

- ❑ Fear of lack of care on becoming a Senior
 - ❑ New concept, lack information on where to retire to, costs

*“In Africa as you age, you **become more and more relevant to the community**, the younger ones come to you for wisdom. There is nothing like old people’s home because the younger ones will take care of you when you are old, but here you are on your own and you end up in an old people’s home. The children have huge debts...they are busy” - TS07*

“...I do not have a pension in Canada. I cannot say I would like to be in a nursing home because I have not saved enough, I cannot afford a good nursing home in Canada. Up to retirement I wouldn’t have completed repaying my mortgage, so I don’t have anything to hold me onto Canada, and those are the determinants of where one belongs ...” - TS010

Strategies for a successful Transition

- ❑ Self confidence
- ❑ Hard work

*“There is no fixed formula for success, but from my own experience and looking at what other people have done, **it takes hard work, focus, determination and relationships** which other people call networking.” – TS04*

*“I don’t walk somewhere thinking I am going to be treated differently, I walk in there with the confidence that I have the **right to be there**, I will smile at everybody and expect them to smile back at me.” – TS01*

To succeed...

- ❑ Settle where there are family/friends
- ❑ Join community groups, ask questions
- ❑ Be curious, be open to learning

*“Reach out to people from other communities, expand your networks, see first what people have to offer. **Integrate into the larger society** because at the end of the day we have more in common than differences.”* – TS01

*“Participation of our people is low because **people are busy working, people are afraid of the weather conditions.** It is proper to say yes I will come only if you will come, otherwise say no, or if things change, call at least one hour before and say you will not make it.”* – TS02

To succeed...

- ❑ Reach out to people and institutions
- ❑ Canadian system is full of opportunities for all
 - ❑ Learn how it works and fit in

“Trying, keep on trying, keep yourself high, don’t be taken advantage of, no! This is a nice country, a country where you can do anything you want provided that you respect others.” - TS024

*“Canadian experience, how to conduct oneself, learn how to do things, **learn the system**, for things that were normal back home such as swearing or slapping someone, are criminal here. Ask, ask, learn or you will meet with a lot of resistance.” - TS02*

To succeed...

- ❑ Learning is a lifelong process, one should not resist change
- ❑ Market yourself
- ❑ Constantly evaluate and transfer your skills
- ❑ Patience; it takes 3 to 4 years to settle down
- ❑ Do research before arrival, have a positive attitude

“before I came to Canada I knew it would be cold” - TS022

“Our attitude to work has to change. We come from a system where one is paid if they are present at work, to a system where every minute counts, where people are paid per hour. Half an hour for lunch means half an hour, no extensions. One has to change such small things that make a big difference.” - TS010

Way Forward

- ❑ Need to educate the Canadian public on the reality of people from Africa
- ❑ Lobby and advocate for school support in transitioning to the Canadian education system
- ❑ The need for strategies and guidelines for agency collaboration, to avoid duplication
- ❑ Inspire immigrant youth

Parting Shot...

“I think of myself NOT as an immigrant, but as a person, a useful person who has made a lot of contribution to this society ... participated in many community activities that have helped build the local and national community of people.” – TS010

Thank you

❖ Africa Centre



❖ Edmonton Heritage Council



❖ Study Participants

❖ Eileen Omosa, Principal Researcher

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