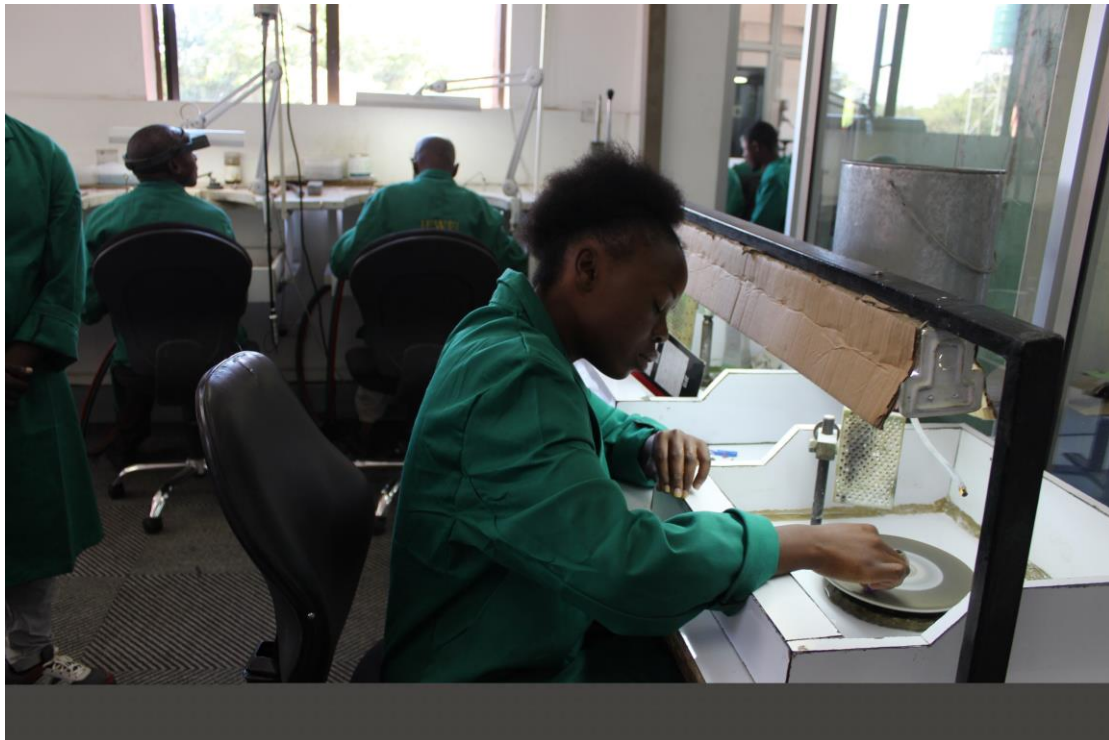


UNHCR Partners with Jewel of Africa to train Refugee Youths in Lapidary.



Edidia Banza, a 19-year-old Congolese refugee, will soon be one of the few specialized lapidarists in Zambia thanks to partnership between UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and Jewel of Africa to accommodate refugees under an apprenticeship program. The partnership promotes the education of both Zambians and refugee youths in the arts of lapidary.

Lapidary is a profession which specializes in sorting, grading, cutting, polishing and designing uncut stones, mainly gemstones, into finished products for sale to the public in Zambia and overseas. Jewel of Africa, a Zambian company, produces beautiful jewels with different types of precious stones extracted from the local mines in Zambia and neighbouring countries.

With over 87,000 persons of concern to UNHCR in Zambia (refugees, asylum-seekers and new permanent residents), there are economic vulnerabilities predominant in the refugee settlements that place youths at risks of not undertaking viable livelihoods activities.

Edidia, under the auspices of UNHCR, is one of the five youths (refugees and Zambians) who have been granted a three-month apprenticeship by Jewel of Africa. This symbiotic venture will educate deserving youths while nurturing a cadre of professional lapidary artisans, of which only few are in Zambia.

“I like this course and am very excited to learn how to process stones,” said Edidia, while tailoring a gemstone at the “Jewel of Africa” workshop in Lusaka.

Another apprentice, David William, 22, a Burundian refugee, thanked UNHCR and “Jewel of Africa” for the opportunity he has to be trained in lapidary. “This is an opportunity which I’ve embraced, and hope will help me in future,” said David, in a thoughtful demeanor.

Dr, Rajnish Sharma, Managing Director of the Jewel of Africa explained that the idea behind the apprenticeship was to address the need to groom local expertise in the specialized field of lapidary. “To build local artisanal skills, we started the apprenticeship program for Zambians. After meeting with UNHCR, we agreed to incorporate refugees in addition to Zambians. Zambia has been hospitable to refugees for many years. In this regard, Jewel of Africa is supporting the government by providing vocational skills to both Zambians and refugees,” said **Dr. Sharma**.

“The opportunity equips benefiting youths with unique employable and practical skills. UNHCR is looking forward to work with other private sector entities to offer practical solutions to the many unemployed youths,” explained UNHCR’s Livelihoods Officer George Omondi Oduor.

The apprentices are trained by expert lapidarists. Dr. Sharma is optimistic that the most promising apprentices will be offered employment by Jewel of Africa, while others will be empowered to use their training to undertake personal ventures in jewelry.

Jewel of Africa will be giving opportunities to future cohorts of youths following the completion of this cohort’s apprenticeships. It is expected that up to 20 youths will have benefited from this apprenticeship by end 2020.

UNHCR Representative, Ms. Pierrine Aylara, made it clear that a significant number of the refugee population in Zambia is composed of youths aged 17-35 who are left idle due to lack of opportunities to help them build resilience. Hence, the Representative applauds the opportunities provided to the youths by Jewel of Africa. *“I wish to appeal to the corporate world to consider partnering with UNHCR to ensure that refugees and others of concern are incorporated into employment and livelihoods opportunities wherever they are. This way, seeing as 34% of the refugee population in Zambia is aged 17-35 years old, they can meaningfully contribute to Zambia’s economic agenda and become proud agents of the society”* said Ms. Aylara.

Building a global African jewellery business which puts world-class expertise at the top of its priorities is a mission on which Jewel of Africa never compromises. For 28 years as a family business, Jewel of Africa places great emphasis on practicing an honest work ethic which will stand the test of time.

