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Dateline AGL – Tanzania: CESO Assignment #4

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Arriving at the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam makes many foreigners anxious. While commissioning of the new international terminal awaits completion of construction, travellers must deplane and enter immigration facilities that are far from contemporary. Immigration officers greet weary traveller with respect, asking the routine questions and inspecting documentation in detail before allowing those without visas to purchase over wooden wickets that are reminiscent of old banks and government offices. But this first point of contact with Tanzania in a hot, stifling, and crowded space filled with angst is most deceiving.

Passing through customs to fetch my single small piece of luggage immediately triggered instinctive reactions and behaviour acquired through decades of international travel and assignments. I was now in a country much different than Canada and the Philippines where I spend most of my time. My flight from Manila to Dar through Doha, was long. Periods of drowsiness suddenly evaporated as I emerged into the hustle of the non-restricted side of security and into the mid-day sun of a tropical sub-Saharan African nation.

On my way to the Peacock Hotel in Dar, I spoke English with the CESO driver after greeting him with ‘Karibu’ and other feeble attempts at greetings and small talk in my far too limited Swahili. Since 2016, I have lived in the Peacock for 52 days. It has become my “home” in Dar es Salaam where I have befriended several staffs. It is also the temporary residence of many CESO workers who pass through Dar on assignments in the interior, or for clients with offices in Dar.

Canadian Executive Services Organization (CESO) is an international economic development organization that focuses on how private sector development and strengthening governing structures drive both economic and social change at local, national, and international levels. Volunteer advisors (VAs), like me, are senior-level professionals who help influence local economic growth by transferring their skills and knowledge to CESO partners and clients.



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My last assignment was for D&M Hospitality Solutions Limited who requested a VA to equip sales and marketing employees in the hospitality industry with knowledge which would help them with sales and the marketing of their business. To do this, D&M worked with the local CESO office and National College of Tourism to host a training program from March 12-22, 2018. Three VAs, James Beatty, Grant Lee, and Roger Charles facilitated training in hospitality financial skills and techniques; strategic marketing; and leadership, change management and problem-solving.

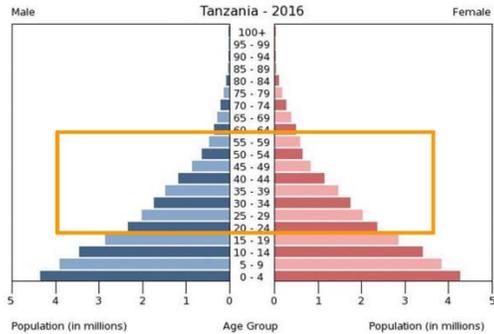
People attending the sessions were generally comprised of millennials and generation X middle/senior management and business owners. Through an interactive training method where principles and standards were reviewed with hands-on technology demonstrations, there was a knowledge exchange between participants and trainers. Everyone, including the CESO volunteers, learned from each other, and all left the program with an advanced level of knowledge and technical skills.

For me, the takeaways from the assignment and experience were no less rewarding than my previous assignments for the Tanzania Private Sector Foundation (TPSF) in Dar es Salaam. In fact, D&M Holdings and the Peacock Hotel are members of TPSF. Work for both CESO clients, TPSF and D&M included extensive training and technology exchange in marketing strategy, tactics, marketing communications, and social media.

Tanzania's economic future for its micro, small and medium-sized enterprises primarily rests with a young population of business people, consumers, government workers and politicians born between 1965 and 2000. The generations born between these years are known as Generation X and Generation Y (Millennials). Generation Z (igen), following Millennials, is entering the marketplace as consumers. The age structure in Tanzania suggests a young country with a population of about 93% under age 55. In 2016, half the population was between the ages 15 and 54.



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Source: CIA World Factbook - This page was last updated on October 8, 2016

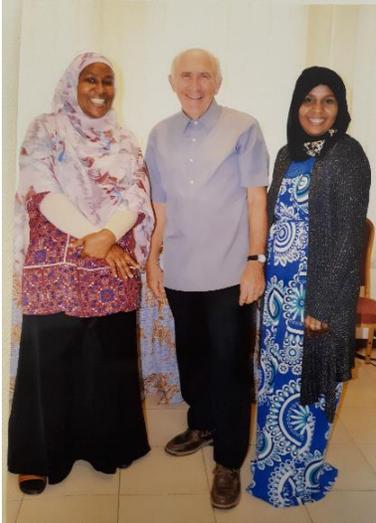
These demographics were clearly represented in the classroom/training environment in my 2018 assignment with D&M and the previous assignments with TPSF in 2016 and 2017. And, the demographics mean everything for the nation.



I learned that contemporary Tanzanian business people are well educated, many from foreign and national universities. Men and women, Muslim, and Christian want to succeed in business at the same level as their counterparts in other countries. They know that their country has wealth, beauty and a unique cultural heritage tied to the Indian Ocean, international commerce, and a European colonial past. But their attention is fixed on a global marketplace to attract more interest in Tanzanian products and services than Chinese investment agencies, safaris, and international mining and oil companies.



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The economy is complex and foreign investors are jockeying for opportunities while msme's are caught in the maelstrom of big business and local, provincial, and federal government evolution to a strong capitalist world player with modern banking/lending institutions. The urban/rural divide is real for small businesses and women entrepreneurs. It is hard to place marketing knowledge and technology in the hands of small businesses in remote rural areas to enable market growth for their products and services outside of their community at a regional and national level. Exporting products internationally is but a dream for most.

The true wealth of the country lies in the entrepreneurial sprit of small businesses owned and managed by millennials and Gen X. They have the intellectual currency to develop the economy of the country by expanding and penetrating markets in neighbouring countries. They have marketing knowledge and skills to attract international buyers of their services and products. But, it takes money to make money in business, and most small business in Tanzania and Zanzibar seem to be undercapitalized. Investment capital is scarce and the means to borrow for business is challenging but not impossible.

The one obstacle that kept rearing its head during my training exercises was the notion of sponsorships from wealthier nations and philanthropists for government-related projects and expansion of private sector businesses. This may be the legacy of a former socialist government and economy, who am I to say? And, there seems to be an interrelated sense among many small business entrepreneurs



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(introduced to me) that sponsors and agencies granting capital are fundamental to success. I am a small business, probably a few steps beyond a microbusiness, and openly despise the thought of receiving a handout from anyone or any organization to mark my business or personal success. I have never sought sponsorship or a grant from any organization – especially from governments. That sort of business development has rarely crossed my mind. This may be a Canadian cultural characteristic or something that goes deeper into family values. Nevertheless, the idea of grants and sponsorships held by many Tanzanian business people and organizations is, in my opinion, a competitive weakness, that can be mitigated through practical business/marketing strategy and tactics.

I believe deeply that the intellectual strength of young women and men micro and small to medium-sized entrepreneurs of Tanzania are on the right path for greater success in their lifetime. Their very nature of outward-looking millennial and Gen X change-agents will serve them well. A young population of open minded people is building a nation and a modern economy. It will take time, and they know what must be done. Western nations can learn much by working with Tanzanian entrepreneurs and understanding the forces they face everyday to build wealth and grow their business. At the very least, it has made this Canadian small businessman more appreciative of clients and the environments in which I do business, while instilling a greater sense of humility taught to me by my friends in Dar es Salaam and CESO.

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