

Megan Elphick – Cambridge Development Initiative Tanzania, Summer 2018

This summer I volunteered with Cambridge Development Initiative (CDI) for two months in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Cambridge Development Initiative is a student led charity based at the University of Cambridge. Each year it partners with KITE Dar es Salaam on a variety of projects (WaSH, Education, Entrepreneurship and Health) aimed at improving the quality of life for Tanzanian communities by collaborating with and empowering students, professionals and local changemakers.

During my two month stay, I worked as Events Coordinator on the Entrepreneurship project. Each year the entrepreneurship project focuses on initiatives that will aid individuals trying to start their own business. Having handed over the previous Entrepreneurship initiative, DAREEnterprises, to a local NGO, this summer we worked on several pilot projects, one of which was the Into Business seminar series. This was a series of interactive seminars aimed at equipping entrepreneurs with the information and motivation they needed to start or expand their business. As event coordinator this was a huge task for me and my day mainly consisted of planning the logistics and content for each of the thirteen seminars, ensuring all speaker requests were dealt with and delegating roles on the day of the seminar.

In addition to the seminar series, we began to create a digital resource to compliment the seminar series. This was a section on the Into Business website where participants, and the general public, could access materials featured in the seminars and additional resources created by our team. The online resource was created to widen the impact of the seminar series. Publishing our resources online meant that demographics the seminar series could not cater for (such as the disabled, parents with childcare commitments and those living outside Dar es Salaam) also had access to the information. Although the online resource remains relatively basic and is still inaccessible to some due to limited internet coverage, it was an essential part of the project as it addressed demographics that had yet to be aided by previous Entrepreneurship projects.

Finally, the team also began research into potential new project streams for next summer. One idea that we were particularly keen on was launching a student consultancy, a project similar to existing student consultancy firms in the UK (such as 180DC) where free advice is provided to small businesses in Tanzania. We felt this would be a logical progression for the Entrepreneurship team as previous projects had facilitated the creation of business ideas and this new project would help make them a reality. The project idea was particularly well received when pitched to Dahlberg, a Tanzanian consultancy firm, and also received support from the Irish Student Consultancy Group that had run a similar project in Tanzania the year before. We hope that with the research conducted this year, next year's entrepreneurship team will be able to develop and incorporate this project into their work load next summer.

This summer did not come without its challenges. As this year was a pilot project, it meant building a brand and reputation from scratch, making it particularly difficult to attract participants initially. However, we re-strategised and pushed on and by the end of the project, our seminars attracted crowds larger than we had ever expected, with participants begging for additional seminar dates. Alongside the challenges faced with a pilot project, we also had to overcome the huge culture shock of operating in Tanzania compared to the UK. For each member on the team this manifested as a unique challenge based on their role. As events coordinator I quickly had to adapt to 'Tanzanian Time' and find a way to make our event schedules more flexible to accommodate for late comers.

Overall, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to volunteer in Tanzania this summer. Working on a pilot project and having the chance to implement my own ideas has not only given me more confidence in my own abilities but also made me more resilient. I look forward to applying the lessons I have learnt from Tanzania to the challenges I face in Cambridge.