

Arif Shivji returns to his roots

Arif Shivji (BComm'99) was born in Tanzania in 1976. A generation later, he was back in East Africa volunteering with a local organization on a four-month project. For the first time,

After years of schooling, Shivji entered the business world of accounting, but after four years as, in his own words, "a dull accountant," he realized there was more to life than numbers and balance sheets.

MBA Without Borders, which aids in the development of countries by making use of the skills of business professionals, caught Shivji's interest. He had worked with charitable organizations before, such as

United Way, Habitat for Humanity and Crime Stoppers.

"I was interested in volunteering overseas though," says Shivji. "But I always believed there would be limited opportunities for someone with an accounting background to donate their time in developing nations." When he discovered MBA Without Borders, he realized it also offered the opportunity to return to his roots.

Shivji's role is to provide management and technical support to grassroots companies, working with the Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives. Much of the centre's work is through the African Development Foundation, a US governmental agency, promoting economic development.

The centre is in Tanzania's capital of Dar es Salaam. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries on the planet, and much of the population survives on under 1\$ a day. Shivji quickly realized that poverty is very complex issue and that private investment in a developing nation can never simply involve throwing money at the problem.

"I've learned how matters are much more complex when the infrastructure that we take for granted in Canada, such as roads, power, communications or the internet, are lacking."

There is also invariably corruption in many levels of government and in law enforcement agencies. Such factors make private investment largely ineffective in helping the poor, but as Shivji discovered, it has made a select few very wealthy.

Volunteering in Africa, however, Shivji also discovered he could play an important role, working closely with local organizations to help the continent clamber out of poverty. His experience in Tanzania has changed his entire outlook on life, since the days when his world revolved solely around financial statements. Arif Shivji says his days are now about making a difference, not just making up the numbers.

By Simon Rose



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