

# Globe Careers



SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

## The stream of conscientiousness

Through MBAs Without Borders, young people add social awareness with international flavour to their résumés, **Roma Luciw** writes

When Blake Dinkin devised an eco-friendly, inexpensive way for the impoverished Rwandan Batwa to fire up their pottery kilns, he says he was just putting his business skills to good use.

"This project helps people see that they are not just beggars and labourers but are creating these beautiful works of art that are being sold in Greece and Italy. In the handicraft field, they are a success story," he said.

Mr. Dinkin, who is back in Toronto consulting for a chain of interactive children's fitness facilities, appreciates his experience in Rwanda. "I think companies want to see that you have field experience in a place like that. Certainly in the not-for-profit sector, it will give me more credibility."

Most people who finish MBA programs know how to tackle financial accounting, business statistics, spreadsheets and case studies. Often they aspire to move on to well-paid positions with large prestigious corporations.

But not always. A small but growing number of MBA grads want to merge their business expertise with social and environmental objectives, such as alleviating poverty.

Mr. Dinkin, a 37-year-old Torontonian who just completed his MBA at the University of Geneva, had a chance to do that through a Canadian non-profit group called MBAs Without Borders (MWB).

Founded three years ago by Tal Dehtiar and Michael Brown, MWB sends people with an MBA to work for local and international businesses, as well as non-governmental organizations, in developing nations. Placements, ranging from one to twelve months, are in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

The younger crop of MBA students have been the first to recognize that they need a different kind of education and work experience in order to be successful, according to Brian Kelly, director of the Sustainable Enterprise Academy at York University's Schulich School of Business.

"Most business issues ... to a large degree now revolve around environmental and sustainability issues," he said.

Mr. Kelly said that in the past five years there has been a shift in the academic front in Canada, the United States and Europe that is seeing many MBA and undergraduate business programs adding courses on sustainable business development, corporate social responsibility or business ethics.

MBA Without Borders is an extension of that trend.

The MBAs sent into the field have their accommodation, airfare, health and travel insurance covered. Host organizations cover some of this cost and the rest comes from donations and fundraising by MWB.

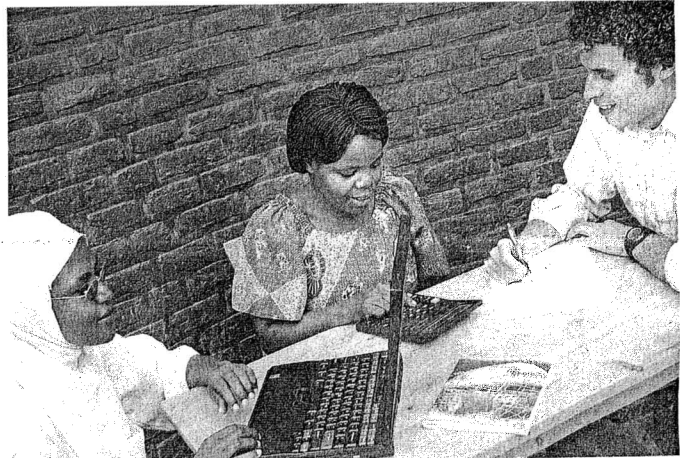
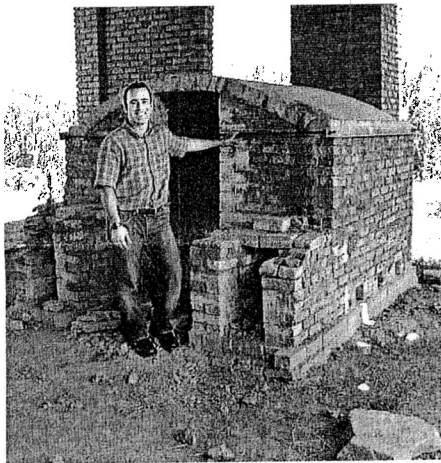
The MBAs get a monthly stipend of between \$750 (U.S.) and \$1,500 a month. "They are definitely not doing this for the money," Mr. Dehtiar said.



MBA students and graduates can offer their expertise to help people in developing countries through an organization called MBAs Without Borders. Some recent examples: Arif Shivji of Calgary, standing left, went to Tanzania in 2005 to help train people in financial management; Blake Dinkin of Toronto, bottom left, devised a way for a group in Rwanda to fire up their pottery kilns with less reliance on scarce wood; also in Rwanda, Andrew Conte of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., below right, helped develop health care services and income generation programs for women and children living with HIV/AIDS.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MBAS WITHOUT BORDERS

To see a photo gallery of MBAs Without Borders in the field, go to [www.reportonbusiness.com](http://www.reportonbusiness.com).



**They are definitely not doing this for the money.**

Tal Dehtiar, MBAs Without Borders

Despite that, there is demand for this experience: In 2005, MWB sent one person to Tanzania. In 2006, it had 10 MBAs working in eleven countries on projects such as helping an alternative bank in Haiti position itself to aid the rural poor, growing the agribusiness in Mexico, and helping a Vietnamese company develop new product lines and train staff. Next year, it hopes to place as many as 50 people.

"Some MBAs want to climb the ladder and make a big paycheque, and there is nothing

wrong with that," said Mr. Dehtiar, 26, MWB's only full-time employee. "But there are some who want to give back and help developing countries through their business skill sets."

At first, MWB only recruited Canadians. Now, postings for various positions are sent to more than 400 university MBA websites and it attracts applicants from around the world. The organization's website is getting 30,000 hits a month, up from 4,000 in December, Mr. Dehtiar said. Applications have ballooned from two or three to as many as 100 for a single position.

In January, MWB sent Mr. Dinkin to Rwanda to spend six weeks working with "Dancing Pots," a project geared toward improving the living conditions of the indigenous Batwa people by setting up a fair-trade enterprise that would

make pottery their primary source of income. War and deforestation have forced the once nomadic Batwa to rely on begging and casual labour in order to survive.

The project was running into roadblocks, and Mr. Dinkin was parachuted in to establish a sustainable business plan that would increase sales of clay pots, lower costs, improve marketing and publicity, and generally help make it commercially viable. The job involved working with non-governmental organizations, liaising with the Rwandan government as well as the local people, and above all, solving problems.

And what was in it for Mr. Dinkin? Invaluable experience. "When you are in the field, you need to rely on your intuition and you need to be flexible," he said.

Because large swaths of

Rwanda's forests have been burned down, making wood scarce, Mr. Dinkin helped develop a system of using briquettes derived from coffee bean parchment to fire up the pottery kilns. In addition to the environmental benefits, it cut costs by 220 per cent.

In Mr. Dehtiar's mind, the notion of using business skills to work in developing countries is a natural fit. "Developing countries provide a world of opportunity. There is a huge amount of potential from a business point of view to make money and to make a big impact," he said. "I see this very much in line with what an MBA provides."

David Wheeler, the dean of the faculty of management at Dalhousie University in Halifax, described MWB as a "niche outfit" that is "part of the engine room for a new way of thinking" about develop-

ment in places such as Africa. This new view is one that moves away from philanthropy and toward a partnership setup that will see these small businesses become self-reliant.

Most MBA students will leave their programs untouched by this stream of thinking and head for the Bay-Street-type jobs, Dr. Wheeler said. But the type of business student who would go on an MWB work stint could end up developing pension products for socially responsible investors or raising venture capital for sustainable businesses.

He said social and environmental concerns should no longer be seen as a "soft" issues. "You don't have to give up a high salary and go work in Uganda to make a difference; the new world is one where people will make money by doing things more sustainably."