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## Promoting the Growth of the Fiti Probiotic Initiative in Tanzania

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## Promoting the Growth of the Fiti Probiotic Initiative in Tanzania

By Dora Parkinson, Gurleen Saini, & Jasmine Wen

First established in 2004 in Mwanza, Tanzania, the Western Heads East program aims to promote economic development, community health, and empowerment of women and youth in East Africa through the establishment of Fiti probiotic yoghurt social enterprises. Their work is based on a collaborative effort between Canadian and East African research institutions, hospitals, NGOs, faculty, staff, and student interns. Each year, student interns travel to East Africa to support the growing Fiti initiative. With the cancellation of in-person internships due to COVID-19, Jasmine Wen, Gurleen Saini, and Dora Parkinson collaborated with Tanzanian partners for the first time through virtual means. Our work was guided by virtual meetings with host organizations and past intern reports. We approached our work through the lens of critical and ethical global engagement and practiced self-reflexivity to ensure that our partnerships were mutually beneficial and that the work was rooted in solidarity.

Working with Mikono Yetu Centre for Creativity and Innovation, a women-led NGO aimed at economically empowering women, we developed a training booklet with the goal of making information on probiotics, prebiotics, and recipes accessible to kitchens across Tanzania. A marketing proposal was also developed to highlight possible strategies to increase yoghurt sales and attract new customers within the local community. Objectives, key messages, and target audiences were established. To increase awareness of probiotics among the local community, posters targeting the general public, children, and the post-secondary population were created. We collaborated with the Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) campus yoghurt kitchen to develop a 3-year business plan to increase yoghurt sales on campus, while working collaboratively with students of other disciplines, such as business students. We suggested the implementation of juice, chapatis, and other yoghurt flavours, such as mango, pineapple, and banana. In addition to this, marketing, manufacturing, and management goals were established. Finally, a leadership handbook was developed to support the transition of the new student leadership team to the campus kitchen, with contents including suggested roles and responsibilities for the team, opening and closing checklists, inventory tracking sheets, and bookkeeping templates.

Throughout the internship, many personal and professional learning outcomes were achieved. Generally, a greater appreciation for how social enterprises operate in a global health context was gained. We learned to adapt to the challenges of virtual internships, such as navigating virtual meetings and re-adjusting our initial goals to better fit the circumstances. Most importantly, we learned what it means to work in solidarity, the importance of an intercultural exchange of knowledge, and how to foster mutually beneficial relationships. Many times, Western educational institutes are praised and viewed as the gold standard of education; however, our Tanzanian partners who worked on these initiatives alongside us shared a wealth of expertise. In the future, it is recommended that interns work toward ensuring that the training booklet is distributed to all yoghurt kitchens in Tanzania, help carry out the proposed marketing strategies, and follow up with the SAUT business plan, while critically assessing the prejudices they hold as students from the Global North.