

**University of Waterloo**

**Faculty of Engineering**

**Useful Things to Know About Living in Tanzania**

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# 1 Introduction

On my final 8-month co-op term, I had the opportunity to work for a solar energy company that provides energy services to rural communities in Tanzania. This company operates by creating solar energy “hubs” in rural communities that are equipped with solar panels that are used to charge a number of portable solar batteries. Customers are able to rent charged batteries from the hubs, and carry them back to their homes in order to power lights and other electronics. On this co-op term, I mainly worked on the development of an Android application that could be used to record customer transactions that occurred when customers rented batteries at the hubs.

During this work term, I lived in Dar es Salaam (a larger city in Tanzania) for about half of the term, and in Tandahimba (a smaller town) for the other half of the term. A map of where these places are located within Tanzania is included in Figure 1. The company that I worked for has central offices in each of these areas, and there are solar hubs set up in many of the rural communities surrounding Tandahimba. I went back and forth between these two locations several times throughout my co-op term depending on the work I was doing.



**Figure 1: A Map of Tanzania with Dar es Salaam and Tandahimba labelled**

Dar es Salaam is the largest city in Tanzania, and is the former capital city. I spent the first part of my co-op term living here in Mikocheni region within Dar es Salaam. Dar es Salaam has a large population of about 4 million people, and is an important economic centre in Tanzania. It is a large busy city, with a lot of people and businesses. Figure 2 includes a photo of the view from the apartment I lived at in Mikocheni.



**Figure 2: The view from the apartment I was living in in Dar es Salaam**

I spent the other part of my co-op term living in Tandahimba. Tandahimba is a small town in Southern Tanzania located in Mtwara region, located near the Mozambique border. Tandahimba is a rural town with a small population, and many people who live there work as cashew farmers. Figure 3 includes a photo of one of the roads in Tandahimba, near where I was living.



**Figure 3: A road near where I lived in Tandahimba**

Throughout my co-op term, I learned a lot of new things about living and working in Tanzania. This report outlines some of the experiences I had in terms of daily living in Tanzania, including the food, transportation options, and other important things I learned. It is a summary of some of the things that I would have found useful to know before beginning my co-op. The purpose of this report is to hopefully provide some of this “would have been nice to know” information to future students who are interested in pursuing similar experiences in Tanzania in the future.

## 2 Language Barrier

One of the biggest challenges I found on this co-op term was the language barrier. Tanzania is a very multilingual country, and there are over 30 languages that are spoken natively by people living in different areas of the country. Swahili is one of the national languages of Tanzania, and is commonly used in primary schools, and in government offices. The large majority of people living in both Dar es Salaam and Tandahimba speak Swahili, although it isn't necessarily everyone's first language. In Dar es Salaam, many people also speak English in addition to Swahili, so it is fairly easy to get by without knowing very much Swahili. However, in smaller towns, it is less common for people to know very much English. In Tandahimba, very few people speak English, they mostly speak Swahili and Kimakonde instead. For this reason, learning a bit of Swahili can be helpful. One website that I found helpful to start to learn a little bit of swahili is <https://2seedsswahili.wordpress.com/>, and there is also a Duolingo Swahili course that is helpful for learning some vocabulary. I have included a list of some key Swahili phrases below, and also in other sections throughout this report.

<b>English</b>	<b>Swahili</b>
Hello (casually)	Mambo! (Response is: Poa!, meaning cool!)
Hello (to an elder)	Shikamoo (Response is: Marahaba)
Good night	Usiku mwema
Later	Baadaye
Welcome	Karibu
Thank you	Asante
Yes	Ndiyo
No	Hapana

## **3 Food in Tanzania**

Throughout my co-op term, I had the opportunity to try a number of different foods. In Dar Es Salaam, there are supermarkets and restaurants available so that you can get essentially any food you can think of. However, in Tandahimba most of the food you can buy is at markets or smaller local restaurants, so there are a lot fewer food options available. This section summarizes some of the more common food options that are generally available regardless of where you go in Tanzania.

### **3.1 Common Lunch/Dinner Options**

One of the most common lunch/dinner options that is eaten throughout Tanzania is ugali. Ugali is a type of dish that has a consistency similar to dough. It is made by cooking flour in boiling water until it forms a solid. This dish is often eaten with your hands, by rolling a piece into a little ball and then dipping it into a sauce. The sauce generally includes beans, chicken, beef, goat, or fish. It is also common for rice to be eaten with these sauces instead of ugali. It is also common for rice to be eaten in the same way as ugali – by being picked up with your hand, rolled into a ball and dipped in sauce.

Another common dish that is eaten in Tanzania is Chipsi Mayai. With a name that translates to “chips and eggs” this dish is essentially an omelette with french fries in it, and is one of my favourite street foods that I have ever tried. This dish is usually served with hot sauce, mayonaise, some vegetables, and a tomato sauce that is somewhat similar to ketchup, and is also generally eaten with your hands. A photo of a Chipsi Mayai I had is included in Figure 4.





**Figure 4: Chipsi Mayai**

### **3.2 Common Breakfast Options**

There were several common breakfast dishes that I consistently ate during my co-op term. Most of them are different types of fried bread or dough. One of the most common breakfast foods I had was chapati. Chapati is essentially a thin pancake that is rolled out and then fried. It is commonly served with beans. Some photos of me attempting to make chapati are included in Figure 5.

Other common breakfast foods included mandazi and vitongozi. Mandazi is a round piece of dough that is essentially the same as a plain donut. Vitongozi is a similar round shaped piece of dough, but is made from rice flour. It is common to eat these pastries with a cup of tea, and the majority of people like their tea extremely sweet with a lot of sugar added.





**Figure 5: Attempting to make chapat**

### **3.3 Other Things to Consider**

In addition to the foods themselves, there were several other things that I learned about manners and eating in Tanzania. Because the majority of foods are eaten with your hands, it is considered polite to wash your hands before a meal. If you're eating at a restaurant, this sometimes means that someone will bring a jug of water around for you to wash your hands at the table. Otherwise there is usually a jug/bucket of water setup in order to allow you to wash your hands. Another important thing to consider is that it is considered impolite to accept or give things with your left hand in Tanzania. So whenever you are receiving something or handing food to someone it is important to use your right hand.

In addition to these cultural norms, another important thing to note is that single use plastic bags are illegal in Tanzania. Prior to plastic bags becoming illegal (which happened approximately half way through my co-op term) most food that you bought in the market would be given to you in a plastic bag. After the bags became illegal, a lot of things started to be

wrapped in newspaper instead. While this is convenient for some food items, it can be somewhat inconvenient for others. Bringing your own reusable bag with you to the market might be useful if you don't want to end up carrying a newspaper full of flour like me.



**Figure 6: A newspaper full of flour I bought in the market**

### 3.4 Useful Swahili Words for Ordering Food

English	Swahili	English	Swahili
I would like ....	Naomba	Beans	Maharagwe
Food	Chakula	Rice (Cooked)	Wali
Water	Maji	Potato	Viazi
Cold	baridi	Fruit	Matunda
Hot	moto	Orange	Machungwa
Chicken	Kuku	Banana	Ndizi
Meat	Nyama	Mango	Maembe
Beef	Nyama na ng'ombe	Cup	Kikombe
Pork	Nyama ya nguruwe	Plate	Sahani
Goat	Nyama ya mbuzi	Fork	Uma
Fish	Samaki	Knife	Kisu

## 4 Getting Around

This section outlines some of the different options for travelling and getting around. Whether you are trying to get across the city or across the country, there are a number of different options available to you.

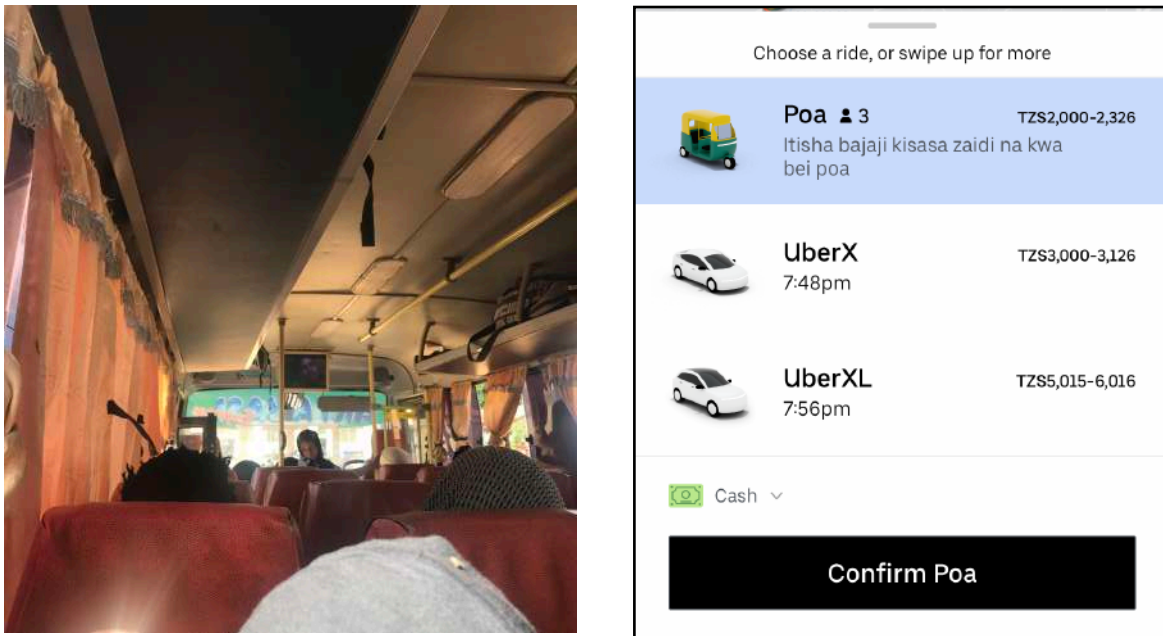
### 4.1 Getting Across Town

If you are looking to get across town, there are a number of options available to you depending on how far you are looking to go. The most common method I used to get around Dar es Salaam was in a Bajaji. These are essentially just small taxis that you can flag down and get to drive you relatively short distances. Bajajis are generally a cheap option, and are generally faster than driving in a car, because the bajaji drivers are able to weave around cars that are stopped in traffic jams. A couple photos of some bajajis are included in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: A few photos of bajajis**

Another option to get short distances around town is on a boda boda, or motorcycle taxi. Although the boda bodas are generally less expensive than the bajajis I rarely rode on them, because weaving around traffic on a motorcycle terrifies me. If you need to drive longer distances around town, you can take a dala dala (a bus) or an Uber (that has both bajaji and car options). I generally found it very difficult to ride on dala dalas because it was never really clear to me where they were going, or what routes they followed. Uber is generally an easy way to get around within Dar es Salaam. The app works the exact same way as it does in Canada, but there is an extra “Uber Poa” option where you can order a bajaji instead of a car if you would like, and you are able to pay the drivers in cash. A photo of a relatively empty dala dala and the Uber app are included in Figure 8.



**Figure 8: A dala dala, and a screenshot of the Uber Poa options**

## 4.2 Getting Across the Country

Throughout my co-op placement, I travelled between Tandahimba and Dar es Salaam, and there were a few times when I visited Zanzibar on weekends. During these trips I took other modes of transportation in order to travel longer distances across the country. In order to travel from Dar es Salaam, to Mtwara region (where Tandahimba is located) the fastest mode of transportation is by plane, but this option is also the most expensive. In general, there is one flight per day that goes between Dar es Salaam and Mtwara region, and it occurs early in the morning. It is important to note that if you take this option though, you need some way of getting to and from the airport in both Mtwara and Dar es Salaam. In Dar es Salaam, Uber is probably the best option for getting to the airport on time, however, if you are leaving around rush hour (starting from around 7:30 or 8am in the morning until around 10 in the morning, and then from around 4pm until 6pm in the evening) it is important to give yourself lots of time because traffic can really slow you down. In Mtwara, there is no Uber, so taking a bajaji is usually a good option for in-town travel. Otherwise, it is usually best to organize a private driver or take a dala dala to get to Tandahimba from Mtwara (which is a couple hours driving).

Instead of flying, it is also possible to drive between Dar es Salaam and Tandahimba either in a private van/car or on a bus. Every time I drove between these two places it took between 8 - 12 hours depending on traffic and road conditions. In Dar es Salaam, traffic gets very busy, very quickly in the mornings, and can delay driving times by multiple hours. For this reason, it is often good to try to leave the city as early as possible in the mornings in order to beat this initial morning traffic. As you get farther out of Dar es Salaam and closer to Tandahimba (specifically in the very last leg of this drive) the roads tend to be dirt roads, so if it rains the road



**Figure 9: The Mtwara Airport**

conditions can become extremely muddy, making it extremely difficult to travel on the roads quickly. During rainy season especially, these dirt roads can really slow down the speed at which you are able to travel by road, and add multiple hours onto the amount of travel time that is required.

Getting to Zanzibar island from Dar es Salaam can happen either by plane or by ferry. The ferry was the only mode of transportation that I took to Zanzibar. This ferry can be caught in downtown Dar es Salaam, and takes approximately 4 hours for this ride. A photo from the ferry coming back to Dar es Salaam is included in Figure 9.

Tickets for the ferry are about \$35 USD for economy seats, and increase by about \$5 for every increase in seat type (to either Business or VIP class). Generally, Friday ferries to Zanzibar are fairly busy so it is helpful to book tickets early in order to ensure that you are able to get a seat on the ferry, and to get the cheaper economy tickets if that is what you would like (there are very few differences between the economy and other seats). Another thing that is important to note is that the area in front of the ferry terminal in Dar es Salaam can be fairly chaotic. There



are sometimes a number of people who will attempt to sell you fake tickets for the ferry, so it is important to make sure that you are actually buying your tickets from the official booth.



**Figure 9: A photo from the Zanzibar ferry arriving in Dar es Salaam.**

### 4.3 Useful Swahili Words for Getting Around

English	Swahili	English	Swahili
I am going ...	Ninaenda ....	Where are you?	Uko wapi?
We are going...	Tunaenda ....	I am .. (location)...	Niko ....
Left	Kushoto	Near	Karibu
Right	Kulia	Car	Gari
Here	Hapa	To drive	Kuendesha



## **5. Visas, Money, Phones, and Hospitals**

This section is intended to be a bit of a guide for some of the more practical information that might be useful for arriving in Tanzania and setting up things with visas, as well as phone plans.

### **5.1 Visas**

A 3-month work or vacation visa can be obtained on arrival to the Dar es Salaam airport. Visas for work cost \$250 USD and tourist visas cost \$50 USD. These visas must be paid for with cash upon arrival before you are able to leave the airport. If it is necessary for you to get a work visa that lasts longer than 3 months, then there are some processes that can be followed in order to do this. These options are sometimes a little bit difficult to follow, as the government websites aren't completely clear on what these processes are. When it was necessary for me to extend my visa, one of my coworkers who was familiar with government processes helped with the process.

### **5.2 Money and Phones**

#### **Money and ATMs**

Once in Tanzania, it is fairly easy to take out Tanzanian Shillings from ATMs. This was how I generally got cash throughout the entirety of my co-op term. Having cash is important, because the majority of purchases you make (for food, transportation, or other things) need to be made in cash. Some more touristy locations in Dar es Salaam do have a debit or credit, as well as the main supermarket, however this is not something that is common and shouldn't really be counted on.

## **Sim Cards and Mobile Money**

It is fairly easy to obtain a new Sim card for your phone from a Tanzanian service provider. Common service providers include Tigo, Airtel, and Halotel. In order to obtain a sim card, it is necessary to bring your passport to the phone store – there are a lot of mobile banking services that can be setup with a Sim card, so it is necessary for the phone companies to record your name and some information when you obtain a phone plan.

After you obtain a sim card and setup a mobile money account, it is possible to use this mobile money to buy things such as mobile data/phone calling plans, as well as electricity credits. In order to obtain mobile money, you can go to small shops or “dukas” that are commonly located around both Dar es Salaam and smaller villages such as Tandahimba. If these stores have signs indicating they have mobile money services, you can give shop owner cash and they will deposit the money into your mobile money account. This process involves the shop owner entering the deposit amount, as well as your phone number into their phone using USSD codes. When the process is completed and confirmed on the shop owners phone, you will receive a text message confirming that the deposit amount has been entered into your account. After you have the mobile money on your phone, you can use USSD codes to purchase things like phone data or electricity credits.

A USSD application is a type of communication technology that allows you to access a program that exists on your phone’s cellular network by typing number codes into your keypad. Similar to how you can access your phone’s IMEI number by typing `*#06#` into the phone keypad, there are other applications on the Tanzanian phone networks that allow you to do things like buy data plans, or electricity credits with your mobile money. It is also possible to send and

receive mobile mobile money to/from your friends using these USSD codes. Although these exact codes vary depending on the network provider, they can be easily looked up online.

### **5.3 Healthcare and Dentistry**

Throughout my time in Tanzania, I was fortunate enough to not require any medical attention. However, there were several times when my coworkers and friends needed to visit a doctor or dentist, and I accompanied them. In Tandahimba, healthcare services are somewhat limited. There are some smaller clinics, that offer some medications and services such as malaria testing. However, sometimes it isn't completely clear what medications are offered or what they do. In general, I would say if you get sick or injured it is better to go to Dar es Salaam for treatment (or back to Canada if it is really bad).

There are several health care options in Dar es Salaam of varying degrees of quality of services, there are several public and private hospitals and doctors offices. There is one private clinic called the London Health Centre that I went to with my coworker when he required an x-ray and also a tooth filling, and their services seemed to be good. However, it is important to note that this clinic is not open on the weekends, so if healthcare is needed outside of regular business hours it will be necessary to go somewhere else. Another important thing to note about healthcare in Dar es Salaam is that there aren't really adequate ambulance services. One of the hospitals in Dar es Salaam might have a single ambulance, but I don't think there is a "911" number that you can call in order to get the ambulance. In general, my coworkers and I used Uber for hospital/doctor's office visits.

In terms of health insurance, I believe that the University of Waterloo's student healthcare plan covers international travel health care for a certain period of time, but it is important to check how long this coverage actually lasts. This coverage also covers any vaccines that may be needed before going to Tanzania. It is important to note however, that even without health insurance healthcare is generally not extremely expensive depending on what services you need. Things like malaria tests can be completed for about \$5, an X-ray is about \$50, and a filling is about \$100.

## **6 Things to Do and Places to See**

In addition to work, I had a lot of opportunities to explore Dar es Salaam, Tandahimba, and some surrounding locations throughout my time in Tanzania. Within Dar es Salaam and Tandahimba, there are a number of markets that sell food and artwork that are interesting to see. Kariakoo is a large market located near the centre of the city. It is always very busy, and is a location where you can find almost anything you could think to buy. In Dar es Salaam, Coco beach is another location that can be fun to visit, and is a good place to eat Cassava (a root vegetable that is common in Tanzania). A photo of a market with art, as well as a photo taken on the outskirts of Kariakoo market, and a photo of Coco beach are included in Figure 10.

In addition to the markets and locations within the city, I also had the chance to explore Zanzibar on several weekends, and visit a National Park. Zanzibar has beautiful beaches, and a nice night market in Stonetown. In general, the easiest places to stay in Stonetown are in hostels. The hostels in Stonetown are usually not extremely full, and booking a few days in advance is generally adequate. In addition to Stonetown, there are also nice beaches on the other side of the

island (called Paje) where lots of people go to try kite surfing. A photo of a beach with fishing boats, and a fisherman in Zanzibar are included in Figure 11.



**Figure 10: Photos of art markets, Kariakoo market, and Coco Beach**



**Figure 11: A couple photos taken from the beaches at Zanzibar**

Midway through my co-op, I also had the chance to visit Mikumi National Park. This park is about 6 hours outside of Dar es Salaam, and I spent a weekend there with a couple of my coworkers. We visited this park with a tour company called Wildness Tours. Through this company, we were picked up from where we lived in Dar es Salaam, and driven to the park, and

stayed in lodge accommodation within the park. Some of the animals that we saw in this national park are included in Figure 12.



**Figure 12: Elephants and Zebras Seen in Mikumi National Park**

## **7 Conclusion**

Overall, I really enjoyed the time that I spent living in Tanzania on my co-op term. I learned a lot of new things, met a lot of amazing people, and a really fun time. Hopefully this report will help to provide some useful information for any future students interested in going to Tanzania. Despite some of the challenges that I had on this co-op term with the language barrier and generally adjusting to some cultural differences, this experience was amazing and definitely worthwhile.