



**African Skills  
and Development Group Ltd**



**American Welding Society**  
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION MEMBER

## **FROM MIKE VALLEZ™**

**October 25, 2024 / Circulation: Digital, 2839; Print 3,054**

### **Open Letter to Africa's Generation Z / Industrial Welding Technology is Coming**

I want to thank all 1100 of you trade school students and teachers who recently attended my lectures about the importance of modern industrial welding to you and your economies. Meeting with you across five East African countries and at eleven colleges, polytechnic and trade schools was a great pleasure, and a milestone in a journey that started twenty years ago. In 2004, I became ill with heart muscle disease which brought me close to death. Through medication and the implantation of a cardiac pacemaker, I became healthy again and now lead a normal life. Grateful that I was given a life extension, I decided to do something useful, and started a group called Global Faith Partners in my hometown of Minneapolis, Minnesota. I recruited a group of citizens from many different religions who shared a common concern about the poverty, hunger and inequality that existed in the world. At one of our monthly meetings, a Catholic priest from Tanzania asked me to visit his Country as a guest of the Catholic Diocese of Njombe Tanzania to assess the needs and see how people lived there.

While in Tanzania, I traveled over 1,500 kilometers on dirt roads with three Catholic priests to visit the people in small remote villages. This trip opened my eyes to the challenges of life in places that had no electricity, no running water, and no sanitation. The HIV Aids crisis was in full swing. One in every ten people living in these villages was an orphaned child who had lost his or her parents to HIV. Children in the "Gen Z" baby boom were everywhere the eye could see, working in the fields with their families, walking to and from school, and playing football. I held many of the young HIV orphans in my arms and I fell in love with them. "Gen Z" was here in great numbers and needed educating. During that first trip, I visited a trade school where students were learning basic plumbing, electrical and carpentry skills. I saw hope in the eyes of these young men and women who envisioned helping their home village get things like running water and electricity. The training was quite elementary.

I returned home after that visit and helped raise some funds for St. Monicas Elementary School in a village called Matamba, Tanzania. Over the years, I saw many transformations occur in Matamba. First it was cell phone towers. Then electricity came to some areas. The United Nations Millenium Development Goals were in place, and infant mortality was starting to get under control. The Village of Matamba got its first gas station in 2019!

Those of you who are part of "Generation Z" are now grown up, choosing your paths, and making your marks in the world. I suspect that most of you can recall the impacts of HIV. Perhaps you or some of your childhood friends lost your parents. Surely, this trauma left its mark. But time heals, and today, I believe that your generation promises to drive many positive and continuous changes in Africa and the

world beyond. Demographers forecast that by 2050, 40% of all working age people in the world will be African. I am envious of all the possibilities that I see in your future careers in engineering, construction, manufacturing and other pursuits. You and your generation will be the future leaders who move this world forward. The world has never seen the kind of change that is coming to Africa. It took 40 years for China to transform from rice paddies to an industrial and economic giant. I believe it could happen more quickly in Africa because today, we have the internet, and instant global communications. The generations coming behind you are larger yet. I believe that many border constraints between countries will fall aside, and digital currencies will facilitate a rapidly growing commercial trade.

After 50 years of working in the engineering and construction field, I have at least another ten years of productive service in front of me, if not more. About three years ago, I changed the name of Global Faith Partners to GFP International, but the sense of a faith filled mission has not changed. I hope to leave a legacy that includes playing my part and enrolling others to do what we can, working with you, toward creating a bountiful and beautiful Africa.

Over thousands of years, societies with more advanced metalworking skills always benefited economically and socially from these skills. The histories of the Copper Age, the Bronze Age, and now the Iron Age are evidence of this. When I first learned about a \$40 billion LNG project coming to Tanzania, I knew from my dual background in engineering, construction and Tanzania, that Tanzania did not have the industrial welding and electrical skills to build such a \$40 billion project. The welding technologies for an industrial society did not exist in most of East Africa. The mission of GFP International expanded from funding a secondary school in Matamba, to supporting a transformation of the trade skills in Tanzania. This gradually expanded to a larger vision to address these needs across Africa. Month after month, the vision grew as I visited other African countries and vocational schools and took inventory of the equipment, facilities and curriculum with three industrial welding training experts accompanying me. The current mission of GFP is expressed on the website of GFP International and supported by the human resources of African Skills and Development Group Ltd. ***Advanced industrial welding and fabrication technologies are coming to a trade school near you.***

Many of you have asked what our strategy is. It continues to evolve and grow. You and your Generation Z counterparts were all twenty years younger when I first visited Africa. My heart is with you, and I will work to serve you until my heart no longer beats.

Best regards,

Eng. Michael J. Vallez, P.E.

(Mike Vallez is the Founder and Executive Director of GFP International, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, and the Founder and Managing Director of African Skills and Development Group Ltd.)

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