

# Overcoming Poverty: One Brick at a Time

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*“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.”*

*Nelson Mandela*

## Being There

Place yourself in the little community of Bergnek, Limpopo in South Africa. Create a picture in your mind as I describe your new circumstance. **Feel it.** You are 6 years old. There are 3,500 people in this community who arrived here in 1997 after being evicted from farms under the Land Reform Act. You are now out in the dry bush 40 kilometres from the nearest major city, Polokwane. There is a hospital to the North just 45 kilometres away or another 40 kilometres to the south. Try going to the hospital, chances are you'll get sent to the other one. Children die here. Water has been a real challenge for the past two years with the community getting a sparse water 'supply' once a week and sometimes only once a month. To add to that most of the people in Bergnek are unemployed and the community is short of about 350 houses. Meals consist of 1 meal a day, 2 if you happen to be really lucky.

The water supply has been solved to a certain extent, since we installed a new pump and reactivated an old well, but must still be carried from water points. Now the community is looking to take even more control of their lives and create economic activity to create reliable and healthy food sources, create jobs and somehow build houses. There have been some houses promised and about 100 have been built. The community is still short of over 250.

## What to do? The birth of One Brick at a Time

During October 2011 My Arms Wide Open facilitated it's Iziko Labahlali program in the community with about 25 people in attendance.

Through discussions with the community, its headman and council we learned that the community actually has a significant clay resource on their property that is suitable for brick making. The clay is replenished each year through perennial rains flooding the river and bringing silt from the high country. As we all talked and drilled down into needs we as a group started to realize we could solve a number of problems by simply making bricks.

The idea to create a brick making facility to support building homes in the community as well as surrounding communities is significant, Why? Well the establishment of a brick-making facility will help us to address a number of items, over a period of time, identified by the community as real needs during our ongoing discussions and programs:

- The need for a reliable water source (Completed Feb 2011);
- Development of sustainable business activities within and in the surrounding communities;
- The need for sustainable and affordable food sources. Particularly fresh fruit and vegetables (Underway with our My World In a Garden Vertical Food Garden program);
- The need for a local health care centre that can provide for the needs of children, expectant mothers and mothers in Bergnek itself as well as surrounding communities;
- The need for suitable and affordable housing. The community needs a total of about 350 family homes;
- Support for the local school;
- Support for girls to be able to stay in school through the supply of reusable menstrual products.

With the well being reactivated the community has the water they desperately needed and enough to support brick making. As we noted above we have one of the needed ingredients, clay from a natural source. As for space, the community has officially set aside land for the brick making business.

## **What will making bricks provide?**

The making of these bricks will provide much needed employment in the community providing a positive impact on over 1,700 people, almost half of the community. Initially the business will employ 12 people with plans to grow that to 24 within the first year as we add additional capacity. The average family in the community has 6 people in the household and so that employment will support 72 people directly in the first year and 144 by the end of the year.

The income from “One Brick at a Time” will also go to support building 2 Vertical Food Gardens at the local school providing fresh vegetables each week for upon to 30 kids and their families (360 people) as well as supporting the community to build the space for a permanent clinic.

In addition to this, “One Brick at a Time” will produce bricks to build the houses the community needs at a significantly lower cost than what has been proposed by the regional government for the houses those houses to be built. Using the locally made bricks the community could build over 200 houses for the same budget the regional government has for 100 houses. That means the “One Brick at a Time” will support and additional 1,200 people indirectly outside of the business. More importantly, the houses will be built using clay bricks, which provide better insulation and weather resistance

addressing a number of sustainability challenges with the current contractor built RDP houses.

## What next?

A full business plan for the business has been prepared and the team has been in discussions with builders and building supply companies in the region. We are hoping to start the project October 1, 2012. We have commitments to purchase up to **1 million bricks a month** from the business.

What we need now, are the funds to set the business up and get it running. The budget calls for an initial investment of **\$150,000** that will allow for production of up to 400,000 bricks a month and an additional investment of \$100, 000 for two additional machines that will scale the business to over 1,000,000 bricks per month.

The investment is required over a two-year period funding mainly equipment and raw materials and will enable the business to initially employ 12 people full time and another 10 on a part time basis. As we add additional brick-making machines we will add an additional 6 people per machine. The goal is 3 machines running 9 hours per day. This does not include the employment that will be created by the building of the Vertical Food Gardens, house building and building a clinic. The kilns we will use have been developed and proven in India and are vertical shaft brick kilns that are also environmentally friendly reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## Application of funds

Brickmaking machines (3) - \$97,286

Startup Costs including forms, patterns and raw materials - \$75,000

Vertical Kiln - \$50,000 - \$75,000 (est. depending on monthly capacity)

## Get involved

- Provide expertise around the project;
- Make a donation to support the overall community initiative or any part of it;
- Get to South Africa - Join us on a trip and help build the project from the ground up.

Although My Arms Wide Open is a Canadian Federally Registered Charity, we work with two fiscal agents for donation purposes. In Canada we partner with [Tides Canada](#) and in the United States we partner with [GlobalGiving.org](#), where we have two active projects listed that you can donate to and get a tax receipt issued which are connected to this initiative: [My World in a Garden](#) and our collaboration with [Pads4Girls](#).