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# Building a Traditional African Hut



By John Baptist Toroyo

## Part One

My name is Mborifue Dakaende. I was born in a village known as Timbiro in Southern Sudan and a Zande by tribe. I had nine brothers and twelve sisters. Whoever reads my story may wonder about the number of children in our home. This is because our father had two wives, and they loved each other and so did we.

When we were still little children, our parents used to tell us what to do. While boys could be sent to collect fire wood, look after domestic animals such as cows and goats, girls were sent to fetch water, bath babies, clean the compound, wash dishes and help our mothers with kitchen work.



During the night, we used to sit around the fire place especially after supper. Our grandparents used to sing for us, tell riddles and stories which were educational.

Whenever our little brothers and sisters went to sleep, then our elders would teach us about what we have to do when we grow up. Some of the many things that we were taught as boys included being hard working, defending the community and settling family problems.

Out of all that we were taught, there was a night when our grandfather taught us about building a house, and that house was an African traditional hut. Being the first born, I felt touched as the teaching was going on. On top of that, my father was the most respected man in our village because of building beautiful African huts which were always admired by whoever looked at them.

I felt I should follow my father's example and at least build one hut of my own. I did not sleep that night because my head was full of building plans.

## Part Two

### Allocating a site

In the morning of the following day, I woke up and went to my father and told him how serious I was about building a house of my own. He welcomed my idea, and praised me that I was now showing a sign of being a man.

He led me to a place which was not far from his own house and said “build here”. He did this because in our culture the boys of the same family build their houses around their fathers’ houses for security.



In a matter of time, the sound of the drum was heard in the compound. While some people supported it with traditional rhythms, others started dancing automatically.



All in all, the party was good and most of the people we had invited kept on looking at the newly built hut and admiring it.

## **The Party Day**

It took us around five days to complete the remaining work which was one day for cleaning and four days for decorating the hut. Having done there was much happiness for building a hut for me so the following weekend which was a Saturday, was a day put aside for a party. Also this was because in African tradition, a party should be made for a new house before it is put into use.

Many things were prepared which included alcohol, foodstuffs fire wood among others. In stock, we had prepared twelve pots of alcohol, two sacks of cassava flour and three goats.

We invited neighbours, friends and relatives. The party was wonderful, because each person ate and drank to his maximum capacity.

By evening, people's faces and words had changed gradually. No one could listen to what the other was saying.

## **Calling friends and relatives for help**

On the second day, I went around to my friends and relatives telling them about my building plans and that I needed their help. They happily welcomed my idea and promised to come and help.

I did not stop there, I also asked our mothers and sisters to prepare foods for us on that day, and of course I was assured of my brothers' support.

It was a Saturday morning when they arrived at our home ready for work. I showed them the place to build on, and we decided to begin immediately.

## **Collecting Building Materials**

After gathering at our home, we left for the forest which was a distance away from home. In the forest, we divided ourselves into three groups.

One group took the work for cutting poles, another group was to look for ropes, and the third group was given the task of cutting grass.

On that day, each group's duties were well done. By sunset, we were walking back home tired and hungry because we had not eaten anything since morning.

On reaching the house, we were welcomed with cold traditional drinks and later food.

Before everyone left to their respective homes, we agreed that all the materials should be carried home from the forest on the following day.

We enjoyed all day long until evening when everybody went back home. As usual, on Monday morning, people came early and everybody was active with the task which he or she did best. While one group was cutting the soil, the others were fetching water tirelessly, others were busy mixing soil with water to make mud.

This exercise almost took us half a day. Then after lunch, we all started fixing mud into the structure to make walls.

By evening, the whole work was done perfectly. The only remaining work was to clean and decorate the hut. This was to be done by myself and my sisters.

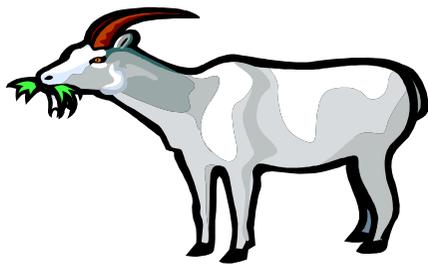
Otherwise, we thanked them for their cooperation and encouraged them to keep up the spirit.

## Wall Making

From the beginning everything was going smoothly without any difficulties. However, on Saturday which was the day for making walls, people hardly turned up, and those who did came late.

When I looked up at the sun, it was already 10:00 am. It was worried about what could have happened.

When I asked my father, he seemed to know what was going on. He said “they could be hung over”. This was because we had drunk alcohol until late in the night. This was on the faces of those who managed to come. They looked tired, sleepy, some were yawning and generally weak to do any work. That was when my father ordered some more local beer and a goat to be roasted for us.



To my surprise, the next morning as I was preparing myself to get up from bed, I heard the sound of something being dropped.

When I looked through my small window, it was my fellow boys dropping down the materials. They did this because they realized that the day before I was so tired, so they decided to do this without my participation.

When I saw how determined they were, I decided to get up at once and join them. We worked so hard the whole day, more than we done previously. The same day in the evening we carried a lot trees and grass for building the hut.

## Setting up the Structure

The following day was the day for setting up the hut structure. This was the most interesting and enjoyable part of the work. This was because something visible was soon to be achieved.

The work was done socially and actively. This could be seen through the actions of the workers, whereby when one was digging a hole, another one would tie the reeds, while the old men were there telling us good stories in order to keep up our morale.



We did our work very well without any one waiting for instructions from the other. By evening, we had done more than we expected. The whole structure of the hut was up.

## Thatching the Hut

Friday, which was the sixth day of our work, was the day for thatching the roof of the hut. We started very early in the morning. Some of the boys, who had experience in this work, climbed up and the rest of us kept on giving grass to them.

Towards midday when the sun was overhead, the grass started making us itchy and all of us were scratching ourselves. We decided to stop for a while, and resume in the later hours of the day.

We did all we could to make sure that thatching was completed that day.

After we had finished thatching, we sat around the pots full of local beer where we discussed on what to do tomorrow. Surely it will be wall making.