

South Africa

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Trevor Mulaudzi

Trevor Mulaudzi is working with students, teachers, and parents to create sustainably clean schools in the townships, where there has been a legacy of filth and bad sanitation.

The New Idea

In order to create a healthy environment for students and reduce school absenteeism, Trevor is convincing teachers, administrators and parents to take ownership of the sanitary conditions of community schools. He is tackling the worst, and yet most easily solvable, hygienic problem first – the toilets. Trevor leads initial clean-ups of school toilets to discourage apathy with regards to unsanitary conditions. Because he recognizes the need for ongoing maintenance, Trevor then convinces the school itself to take responsibility for sustaining the high level of cleanliness. This responsibility includes teaching students who come from remote areas without toilets how to properly use the facilities. By encouraging sanitary conditions in the toilets, Trevor's project helps set a standard for cleanliness that then moves beyond the toilets to all other parts of the schools.

He has used his initial toilet-cleaning project to help schools raise both funds for the school and awareness among the community about health and sanitation. He supplies the schools with toilet paper and cleaning materials at a low cost and encourages the schools to sell these products to parents and the rest of the community for a higher price. In this way, the schools generate income while also building community awareness and contributing to the improvement of sanitation in the home. Since schools purchase the cleaning materials necessary for the initial clean up and continuing maintenance from Trevor, his project is sustainable. The income from these transactions is the payment he receives for the services he provides.

Trevor convinces parents to become more actively involved in the school by involving them in the initial clean-up project and then encouraging the school to employ some of these parents as cleaners and pay them a small wage for this service. In this way he not only increases the accountability of the school to the parents and community by having the parents present during the day to monitor activities, but also slightly alleviates the high unemployment in these areas.

The Problem

Most township schools in the country are in disrepair due to a lack of funds to improve the facilities and an accompanying attitude of apathy. Neither the administrators, teachers, students, nor the community take responsibility for creating sanitary, healthy learning environments. No one tends to the school grounds, hallways, classrooms, and toilets. These neglected environments are highly undesirable to learn in and are both physically and mentally harmful to the pupils. Due to the uncleanly conditions, pupils quickly develop attitudes of disrespect for both school

property and teachers. Unsanitary toilets present a particularly egregious sanitation problem. Students who come from homes with pit toilets and have never been taught to use a flushing toilet do not use them properly. This lack of proper use combined with a lack of regular cleaning leads to horrific toilet conditions that often spread beyond the toilets when sewage starts seeping out into school grounds. Additionally, schools cannot afford toilet paper, which leads to children using all sorts of substitutes such as socks or newspaper, thus causing blockages that leave the toilets unusable. Many children leave the school grounds to use a toilet elsewhere, often in a local pub where they end up getting drunk.

Most faculty members are apathetic to the situation due to the fact that their own children attend private or “Model C” schools. The principals that Trevor approached about the conditions of their schools all claimed to know nothing about the state of the toilets since they had never inspected them. The Education Department assumes that use of a flushing toilet is common knowledge and hence remains ignorant to these sanitation problems in schools.

The Strategy

Trevor began his work in the Carletonville area of the North West Province, where he was stationed at a mine and first noticed the filthy conditions of the local schools. Coming from a different ethnic group than the people of Carletonville, however, Trevor encountered some suspicion on the part of the local residents as to what purpose he intended for the waste that he was collecting. A superstition that he would use it to bewitch the children began to circulate. This experience led Trevor to move his initial work to the Northern Province, where he is known and respected as someone of the same background. He began by volunteering to serve as community facilitator with the Thohoyandou municipality and interested them in an alternative pit latrine system that he designed to combat ground water pollution. This appointment gave him access to all the schools in the Northern Province, for which he is designing model hygiene and sanitation systems.

Upon entering a school, Trevor and his team of professionally trained cleaning staff perform a heavy duty cleaning of the toilet facilities and educate the children on good toilet hygiene and general sanitation issues. In order to prevent further problems in the toilets, Trevor physically takes a flushing toilet apart and shows the children how it works. He has also found that most children are eager to help maintain a high standard of cleanliness once they see the final result of the initial clean-up project. One of Trevor’s most reliable tools when dealing with the children, many of whom come from deeply religious backgrounds, is the Bible, which he quotes on all sorts of topics from health and hygiene to sex and education.

Trevor’s successes would not be possible without the support of the parents, who he engages early on. He has found that most mothers are more than willing to help him and his team with the initial clean-up and will gladly continue to maintain the facilities. Besides the obvious benefits this may have to unemployed parents, it is also an excellent way of monitoring the teachers and activities at the school. Trevor sadly admits that many teachers are so unmotivated that they often do not actually teach their classes; but with the new addition of parents on the premises he has noticed that the teachers are more diligent.

Trevor accesses funds for his project from various donors, one of which is the Danish Embassy who offered to give R15000 towards the initial clean-up, if the school could provide R5000. It was this proposal, and the failure of many schools to raise the money, that showed Trevor how desperately these schools needed help and encouragement to raise funds for themselves. He has now approached the local municipality who has agreed to assist him with his project and the necessary funds for a widespread campaign. It is also through municipalities that Trevor intends to spread his idea, thus reaching the rest of the country and hopefully become policy in South Africa's schools. Trevor believes that by using the municipalities as the vehicle for replication it will be far easier for the idea to be accepted by people of different ethnic backgrounds to him, as there are many superstitions related to feces in the more rural areas.

The Person

Since Trevor was very young, he recognized the importance of education. His father was a school inspector and his mother a school principal. Both parents encouraged their five children to take pride and joy in their education, resulting in all of them now being highly qualified professionals. Trevor loved school so much, he used to remain there long after the last bell had rung and always volunteered to help with ground maintenance or odd jobs.

This love of education has remained with him and after noticing more and more children off school grounds during school hours, he was driven to find out why. He questioned over a hundred children about their truancy and many replied that they were going to the toilet, which lead Trevor to the schools to investigate. The results shocked him so much that he devoted his life to cleaning school toilets and schools in general.

Trevor was one of the first trained black geologists and worked as chief geologist on one of South Africa's largest mines, with all the perks of a well paying job such as company cars and a house. He resigned from this comfortable job to follow a new path, and to give back to the education system that served him and his family so well.

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