



Contribution ID: 16

Type: not specified

## **Seeds of Hope: How Small Community Libraries – And Children Around the Globe - Are Contributing to Sustainable Development in Poor Rural Villages**

A tiny village in the heart of Limpopo Province finds renewed hope in books, education and a library's capacity to open the doors to the world. The Makuleke Library represents a token of opportunity in the aftermath of apartheid. Dignified and resourceful, the marginalized Makuleke people have long known that the answer to reversing their cycle to poverty was education. But without the educational tools and resources, their hands were bound and tied by a chain of post-apartheid. Through the efforts of the small USA-based non-profit organization, Sharing to Learn, children around the globe became aware of the plight of the Makuleke Community and subsequently raised their voices and their resources to change history. Through global education experiences, which link schools around the world with the impoverished community, children around the globe work towards the social equality and development of the Makuleke Community. By sharing their own resources, children as young as three years old have been able to be a part of the establishment of the community's first two libraries. They have given the gift of books and a more equal education. The children of Makuleke Village now have a chance to grow into the person that they wish to become through the books and services that our two libraries provide. Our libraries are learning centers; they are afterschool schools. They house thousands of books and hundreds of educational resources, which are not available in the village schools or homes. In the past two years, we have witnessed an evolution of a culture of reading for knowledge and reading for pleasure. Students' comprehension, reading fluency, English language vocabulary, general study skills and self-confidence have all improved thanks to the two little libraries. And while those accomplishments merit celebration in their own rite, the Makuleke Village children have also gained something much deeper and more intangible – the healing quality of friendship. Our libraries have bridged the geographic and socio-economic divide; they have opened the door to global awareness, global education and global citizenship. Through dynamic learning experiences, children from opposite corners of the globe are able to learn with and from one another. In turn, the children gain confidence, a sense of worthiness and an understanding that skin color is not defining. Suddenly the children of the rural Limpopo bush aren't so isolated anymore. Our humble libraries are a seed of hope that allow communities of children to blossom.

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