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## It Makes a Village

Dallin Frampton built a home in Kenya, and now CrossFit is building momentum for its humanitarian efforts in Duruma land.

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By Dallin Frampton

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All images: Dallin Frampton

Working in Kenya for just over two years now, it has been my opportunity to see just about everything that the people of Duruma land have to offer, traditionally and culturally, down to the very smallest detail of their day-to-day lives.

This 250-square-mile area of Kenya has been home to CrossFit's aligned non-profit organization, Koins for Kenya, for about a decade. Koins' hard work is summed up quite simply: to find sustainable and realistic solutions to the problems of food scarcity, water sanitation and drought, and educational challenges. Koins has had an unbelievable impact on these people's lives through sustainable community gardens, dam projects and countless schools that now dot the landscape of Eastern Kenya.

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However, I am still amazed at a basic necessity that is overlooked by Koins for many different reasons: shelter.

Unless you've been to a country that falls under the umbrella of the Third World or developing world, it's incredibly hard to understand the Duruma people's living conditions. Working with Koins in the village of Dzivani for many months in 2010, I not only saw the humble shelters built by Kenyans but I was also able to construct one myself. With the help of a few villagers and some newly made friends, I spent my first two weeks in Africa building and mudding a hut that I would call my own for the next chapter in my life.

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Comparing my home in Kenya and my parents' house in beautiful Salt Lake City, Utah, I can now draw the conclusion that these two environments aren't comparable at all. In fact, the two are so far away from each other on the economic scale that it's hard for words to explain the division that exists between the North American world and rural Kenya. But I'll try.

#### Building Codes?

First off, you can't build a house in the U.S. without owning the land to put it on. I know my parents went through a lengthy process of looking, negotiating and finally buying the land where they later began to build the house they still live in today.

In Duruma land, however, land is passed down through generations and bloodlines. No banks or third parties are involved, and there are no property lines to abide by, home restrictions to consider or construction applications to file in order to begin construction. As long as the whole extended family is aware of where the relative's house is going and what the plan is, there is no problem whatsoever, and the soon-to-be homeowner can begin construction immediately if desired.

In my case, the people of Dzivani were so excited that we were constructing two classrooms with them that they actually gave me the land on which to build my house, but I don't think it would have broken my bank if I had to buy it from someone. You can get an acre in this area for about \$200 US.

The next step my parents undertook in constructing their home was to get with the general contractor and map out exactly how many rooms there would be in the house, how long and wide the rooms would be, and where the bathrooms, the family room, the kitchen and other rooms would be built. They had to look at how to connect power for electricity, how to hook up with the main sewage line, and how to get water to the house in order for us to have these amenities at the flip of a switch or turn of a knob.

Building in the Duruma land area of Kenya is a little different: they shortcut past all the details North Americans have to focus on. Not only do the Kenyans not have the resources available for these comforts, but these concepts are also so foreign to them that they wouldn't know what you were doing if you tried to dig a trench all the way to their front door for a water pipe. Nor do they bother with deciding on a number of rooms, because there is usually just one room, with the parents sleeping on one side and the children on the other.



***An acre of land costs about \$200 in Duruma land, but most land is passed down through generations and bloodlines.***

And sewage management? Well, to paint the picture for you, after a couple of days wrestling with sisal-leaf ropes, a couple of mango trees for support and a load of palm leaves, I was living the dream with my very own place to answer the call of nature, a common type of arrangement for the Duruma people.

For my parents in Utah, backhoes, cement trucks and lumber shipments started making the blueprints a reality. Countless days were spent pouring the footings, hammering plywood and abiding by the construction code in order to ensure the inspector signed off on the hard work of many skilled workers. The process went on for just over a year, and the finished product was a beautiful three-floor, six-bedroom home in sleepy Holladay, just outside of Salt Lake City.

Construction in Dzivani was completely different, and living through the process was one of the most humbling and eye-opening experiences of my life.

### **This Old Hut**

First, we started off by digging 18-inch-deep holes in the ground about a foot apart from each other, which would be comparable to laying the foundation of the building. These holes went around the entire perimeter of my house, as well as inside it to separate between my bedroom, my hallway-type kitchen and my roommate's room. Digging was no easy task considering the rocky layer just below the clay-like soil, and it took us almost an entire day to finish.



*The house is framed and ready for mudding.*

From there, we used nine-foot-tall adolescent mongrove trees and tree branches found in Dzivani forest to fill the holes we had dug. After packing the trees down firmly with stones and backfilling with natural clay, it was time for the horizontal pieces to be put in place, which would really make the house look like it was coming together.

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Once again using mongrove branches, we started at the top of our columns and worked our way down, attaching horizontal branches on either side of our posts, exactly parallel with each other, using rope made of sisal leaves. The insanely strong fibrous rope was cut extremely thin and soaked in water to increase flexibility. After we slowly wrapped the rope downward and attached more and more parallel horizontal branches, the skeleton of the house was complete. We were about four days into the house at this point.

Looking back, I was really confused and anxious at how these branches and ropes were going to keep me out of the elements, but I soon figured out that these Kenyans were no dummies. The horizontal pieces we had set in place actually acted as little shelves for our next step: the mudding of the house.

As mentioned earlier, the ground in this village is made of extremely tough and durable clay. This would work perfectly for the walls of the house, so we spent the next full day gathering and digging up a mountain of dirt and prepping it for the application. We split the dirt into sections, added precisely the right amount of water, kneaded it into what looked like loaves of bread, set them in place in between the horizontal sections, and filled in the gaps by throwing mud balls at the holes we could see. With the help of about eight other guys, we knocked this out in about two full days, and I was covered from head to toe in mud that I don't think came out of my hair for at least a week.



***Constructing a watertight roof entirely from materials growing nearby.***

The final stage was the roofing. This was by far the most important and tedious part because we had to ensure the place would be watertight in the approaching rainy season. Using large mango-tree branches, we made a criss-cross-type arrangement on top of the whole skeleton, which acted as the beginning of the ceiling. Once these branches were tied down securely, we used sisal wood and more mongrove branches to build a very simple variation of a vaulted roof, once again tying it all together with fibrous rope made from sisal leaf.

I had no idea what I was doing, and it was amazing to watch the Kenyans build an amazing-looking roof out of the simplest materials in their environment. As we were completing the skeleton of the roof, there was another guy who was working on the "shingles" we would use for it. Using nothing more than an 18-inch stick of wood and palm leaves, he individually wrapped each leaf around the stick, pulled it down tight and tied it off close to the base, making what looked like a giant comb. We needed about 500 of these, so while those were being finished up, my roommate and I, Malau, mudded in our doorframe and door, moved all our gear in, and got settled in our newly built but roofless house.

At this point there was really nothing more for me to do because the roofing was left to the experts, and they spent a day or two securing all the palm-leaf arrangements in perfect alignment. Finally, the house was complete.

### **Building a Community**

After literally building my own shelter, I can honestly say that I hold a respect for these people challenged by none. They use the simplest materials to build amazing houses out of sticks and mud. I don't think I have ever slept as well as I did in my hammock under the roof of a true Duruma house after those long days of working on it.

CrossFit has now been working in this area of Kenya for about nine months, and although our impact is in a relatively small village, our work has impacted thousands of people. By building a four-room school building, a 35,000-liter water cistern and 60 desks in the village of Dzendereni, we have seen incredible improvement not only in the classroom but also in the faces of the villagers. They have seen what CrossFit is capable of doing, and the hope that radiates from their eyes is contagious.

CrossFit is going to bring as many affiliates as possible on board to help create sustainable and realistic solutions for education, water and food for these villagers in Kenya, and no affiliate should underestimate the immense difference they can make in this part of the world and the incredible impact they will have on the lives of the Duruma people.

Coach Greg Glassman is bringing Kenyan CrossFit employee Anthony Yama to the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games to speak to the community about CrossFit's work in East Africa. He'll be at the Games all day every day to explain what CrossFit's assistance has meant to Dzendereni and how affiliates can get behind the projects in Kenya.

If you're interested in supporting CrossFit's efforts and helping change lives in Africa, look for me and Anthony at the Games or email me at [Dallin@CrossFit.com](mailto:Dallin@CrossFit.com).



**Putting the finishing touches on Frampton's new home.**



Mike Warkentin

### About the Author

*Dallin Frampton is a 21-year-old Salt Lake City resident who is always thirsting for adventure. He's an avid skier, marathoner, triathlete, surfer, rock climber and mountain biker who now works for CrossFit as the project manager for the humanitarian effort that has just begun in Kenya. He holds Level 1 and CrossFit Endurance certificates and coaches at CrossFit South Valley. When he's not training, he's the lead singer and guitarist in his band The Down Harmonies.*