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Ian Simaata

Bricklayer

From Skilled Artisan to Budding Entrepreneur

If you think all a bricklayer does is lay brick upon brick and plaster walls – then think again! There's more to being a bricklayer than meets the eye. In fact, a single bricklaying project calls upon a variety of skills.

Meet 40-year old Ian Simaata, a qualified and skilled bricklayer, who employs himself and others through taking on small to medium construction projects in the Zambezi region. This is his story.

Village Boy

Ian Simaata was born at Katima Mulilo in the Zambezi region, into a family of eight children. He attended the Silumbi Primary School until

Grade 7, but when his father passed away in 2000, Ian transferred to the Nakundu area, where he completed Grade 12 at the Sandji Senior Secondary School.

Growing up as an orphan, Ian's grandparents, who took up custody of the children, had to work hard to make ends meet. “My grandparents raised us at the village, where I did not really have rolemodels to aspire to and look up to. My siblings and I were just simple village children, who tried to help out and assist where we could, in making ends meet”, he shares.

Although he passed Grade 12 with good grades, financial difficulties discouraged Ian from seeking study opportunities. He could also not afford to sit around idle and had no choice but to start looking for work.



Job Hunting

Although he never demonstrated any interest in bricklaying, Ian, in his job search, ended up at a local construction site, where he would from time to time land opportunities to work as a henchman. “Growing up at the village, I never saw bricklayers do what they do; I only saw the completed buildings and knew that this building was a classroom and that one a shop”, he recalls. As a henchman to experienced and skilled bricklayers, Ian realised that he not only enjoyed the hard labour, but that he could actually see himself becoming a skilled artisan, too. “Thinking back, working as a henchman opened my eyes to the construction industry and the potential out there to offer your skills to construction employers and projects”, he adds.

Exciting Training

Ian decided to enroll at the Zambezi Vocational Training Centre at Katima Mulilo. Although, at the time, he also entertained the option of enrolling for a course in Plumbing, Ian ended up registering for a three-year training course in Bricklaying.

From the onset, Ian decided that he had to remain focused on his training. “I told myself to refrain from drinking alcohol, doing drugs and smoking. I saw the effects of peer pressure on many of my classmates who couldn’t handle temptation. When we started the course, we were fourteen, but upon graduation only four of us successfully graduated”, he says. “Bricklaying is a demanding course. What pulled me through was sheer discipline and commitment”, he adds.

World of Work

Upon graduation, Ian started offering his skills to construction companies involved in the Zambezi Waterfront Development at Katima Mulilo, with one goal in mind – To gain enough practical experience in all areas of construction to allow him to venture into the sector as an independent contractor.

“I always knew that I could do better on my own. Bricklayers are the bosses of the construction industry. We employ everyone, be it an electrician or a plumber. It is really the leading occupation in the construction field. Already at Level 2 in your training, you can start to work and earn an income. With other trades, you need to complete your full course to be taken in by companies”, he notes. “But, you need to put in the hard labour and the overtime. If you pour concrete late in the afternoon to meet a deadline, you need to be willing to put in the extra hours to wait

until its settled to finish off”, he adds.

Budding Entrepreneur

Today, Ian is excelling as an independent subcontractor, who takes on small to medium construction projects, in and around Katima Mulilo. Landing contracts to keep his company afloat often proves challenging. Since he is yet to acquire his own heavy tools and equipment, Ian has no option but to rent these from tool hire companies. But, he remains committed to the cause.

Driven by an intense desire to succeed and the realization that others depend on him for their livelihoods, this father of four appreciates that his reputation as a contractor in a very competitive industry will always be his biggest asset.

“I don’t have these assets now. It’s also difficult sometimes when I have to decline opportunities outside of town, because I don’t have my own vehicle. But my reputation will always be my biggest asset. As such, I make sure that every project we complete is a project of high quality”, he emphasises. “As a small to medium business enterprise in this sector, you need to be flexible as you grow. I can get a call now to put in tiles or paint a building and as an entrepreneur, I need to be ready”, he adds.

VET Advocate

Ian’s experience of the construction sector has also made him a passionate advocate for technical and vocational careers. Whenever he has the opportunity, he encourages the youth to consider technical and vocational career options.

“The negative perception out there discourages school learners to consider technical and vocational careers. I don’t understand why, because there are options that take you off the streets. Whenever I have the opportunity, I encourage young people, especially at the village, to consider these careers and to enroll at vocational training centres, like Zambezi VTC”, he highlights.

For now, Ian is focused on landing more contracts and growing his business. He appreciates that

while he still has some way to go in positioning his business as a force to be reckoned with, that by making the sacrifices and dealing with the challenges, he can and will succeed.

“Hardship has taught me to be responsible. Once you become a parent or when you get married, you truly understand the true meaning of responsibility and that you can’t afford to sit idle”, he notes.

Away from the construction sites, Ian enjoys spending time with his

family. His wife, Liz supports him in his endeavour to grow his venture through the rendering of high quality construction services.

Ian Simaata – A driven and spirited young man whose zest for life and what he does inspires those around him to always do their best. His story teaches us that success comes with sacrifice. That without sacrifice, success is impossible. However, for Ian his success is not sacrifice at all, because he loves what he is doing. His passion for

what he does and his desire to work for himself has brought him success. He leads by example and inspires others to also strive for the best they can be.

He is living his passion as a Bricklayer.

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