



# A guide to starting a B4H Chapter

## Overview

Bicycles for Humanity (B4H) is a grassroots network of local groups or chapters that aims to empower the people of Africa by providing bicycles and establishing small bicycle sales and repair businesses. A bicycle allows a healthcare worker to visit 3 to 4 times the number of patients in a day, it allows a mother to transport water and get her goods to market. For students living a long way from schools, it allows them more time and energy for studies.

B4H Chapters come together to collect bicycles and ship them to community based organizations in Africa. Bicycles are loaded in 40 ft containers which are delivered to the partner organizations, where they remain and are run as community bicycle workshops, which we call Bicycle Empowerment Centres (BECs). BECs are supplied with tools and trained locals provide valuable maintenance services. Income from bicycle sales and servicing helps sustain each BEC, creates jobs for mechanics and supports the development programs of local partner organisations.

Empowerment in Africa is the ultimate goal, but as a grassroots network, B4H can also empower members of your community by getting involved and helping others in a direct and tangible way. Our projects are very rewarding on many fronts. Firstly, we believe that it should be fun, every team has their own unique style and each group's approach is different and exciting. Recognizing that there is a learning curve, the growing B4H family is developing a number of tools to help you and your team to get going easily and efficiently.



## Transparency

Often when assisting an organization that works in developing countries, supporters are not sure exactly where their funds go, and rarely have any direct input into projects on the ground. Each B4H chapter has the opportunity of knowing the partner organization in Africa and is able to communicate with them to help understand their needs. Each chapter also defines the fund raising initiatives and bike collection strategy. You and your team handle all aspects and are free to take it in whatever direction you wish, raising funds as you see fit and knowing that all money raised goes directly to the costs associated with shipping bicycles.

## B4H International

B4H International is a supporting organisation for B4H chapters, providing advice and guidance for new chapters. It has a coordinating role, matching the demand from African partners with the capacity of chapters to make shipments. It is also a fundraising body, seeking funds to support the implementation costs for African projects.

## Communications

The Bicycles for Humanity website provides general information about what B4H does, and links to chapter websites. As a chapter, you are able to create your own website and to adapt the Bicycles for Humanity logo to include your chapter's name. Some chapters start blogs through free services like Wordpress ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)), while others register their own domain.

There is a B4H Google Group at XXX, which provides regular updates on B4H activities. (ARE WE STILL USING GROUPOSITE?)

## Partnering in Africa

The BEC model began in 2006 in Namibia, where 25 have been established in partnership with the Bicycling Empowerment Network Namibia. Since then, BECs have been delivered in South Africa and Zambia, and chapters have provided shipments to other programmes in Ghana and Malawi.

B4H International's approach is to build clusters of BECs in each country where it works, creating self-supporting local networks that have a much greater likelihood of being sustainable than one-off projects scattered throughout Africa.

## Which logo?

The original B4H Logo (pictured right) was used on the main B4H website until September 2010, when it was replaced with the new logo (left). Chapters were free to use this logo, but for different reasons many opted to create their own. In order to create a coherent identity for the movement as we expand, it has been decided that all new chapters should use the new logo, incorporating their chapter name in place of the word 'International'. Existing chapters (ie those founded before October 2010) are free to use their existing logo, but may adapt the new logo if they wish.



**BICYCLES FOR HUMANITY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**



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for  
**Humanity**  
.org

B4H International will not provide chapters with logistical or financial support for projects outside its program countries, but is glad to advise chapters on the viability of shipping to different projects.

## Costs

To send a container or BEC to Africa, there are 2 major costs, buying the container and shipping it there. While some chapters have gained discount shipping, the majority need to pay commercial rates. We send 40 ft (12m) 'high cube' containers, which are taller than standard containers and allow for an extra row of bikes to be loaded. A container costs around \$2000. Shipping to Africa varies between \$5-\$8000 from north America, depending on the location of the shipper and the recipient, bringing the total cost to between \$7 and \$10,000.

## Fundraising

There are many ways to raise the funds for a shipment, and each chapter will approach this in a different way. Some ideas from existing chapters include:

Sponsored bike rides

Writing grant proposals to charitable foundations

Requesting donations of \$10-\$30 with each bicycle

Selling African crafts

Wine and cheese nights

Musical events

Selling donated bicycles that aren't useful in Africa (eg collectable road bicycles can generate substantial income)

Corporate donations (large and small)

## Tax Status

Each B4H Chapter needs to find its own solution for tax deductible status. This may be through registering independently with the relevant government body in your country. It

can however be done through other registered chapters in your country (though note that with no administrative staff, most chapters are reluctant to do this). Some chapters have used partnerships with relevant partner organisations, such as churches, service clubs like Rotary, Kiwanis or Lions, or HIV/AIDS support organisation. Some chapters, however, have not obtained tax-deductible status and have still managed to ship multiple containers.

## Media

Shipping bicycles to Africa is a very media-friendly activity, and local radio, print and TV can all be approached to provide coverage. Timing your media coverage to occur in the week leading up to bicycle collections or fundraising events can have a major impact.

## Logistics

Having a storage facility to collect and prep the bikes is ideal, but in a lot of communities this is not possible. A 'just in time' collection model is also possible, where the container arrives the first day of the collection, and bikes are collected over a one or two day period, prepped and loaded. This model requires a lot more planning and involves a risk of under- or over-shooting targets, but it has worked out for a number of chapters.

## Inventory and shipping documents

You will need to be very accurate with your inventory, especially when it comes to the quantity of bicycles shipped. If a container is inspected and the number of bicycles in the container does not match the shipping documents, a fine may be levied on the recipient organisation. Some items are restricted or attract high duties, so you should never include anything apart from bicycles, spare parts or bicycle tools in the container unless you have written confirmation from the recipient organisation.

## Organizing a bike collection

Most chapters depend on holding a bicycle collection, or series of collections, to fill a container. Most chapters find that once they start promoting a bike collection, their biggest problem is an oversupply of bicycles, though this is not always the case, and some struggle to fill a container.

To hold a collection you'll need a large, secure space to store the bikes. Some chapters hold collections at sites other than their storage facility, if this is necessary make sure you have transport available.

## What to ship

One common criticism of programs that ship used goods to Africa is that they are 'shipping junk'. B4H tries to ensure that only quality, useful items are sent in all its containers. Each country and each project will have its own preferences, but in general you should aim to ship mainly adult mountain bikes (those with 26x1.75 size tyres or larger).

The bicycles do not need to be repaired, this is done through our African partner programmes, but should be in a repairable state.

Spare parts that can still be used are also welcome. Often these can be stripped from otherwise damaged bicycles.

## What NOT to ship

While each partner, and country, is different, the following items are inappropriate for B4H shipments in most circumstances:

Bicycles with narrow wheels (road bikes, city bikes)

Bicycle frames (these are costly to build up)

Bicycles with significant damage that are beyond repair. If they are junk in your city they will be junk in Africa

Clothing and shoes (new or used)

Boxes of mixed junk that people have cleared from their garage

Food

Medical supplies and equipment

Anything that is not a repairable mountain bike, good spare part or has been negotiated with your African partner.

## Loading a container

When organizing volunteers, there are three main groups needed when managing a collection. The first group thanks the people for donating their bike, listens to the stories of what the bike meant to them and receives any cash donations from those donating bikes. A second group preps and loads the bikes into the container. This requires 2 people per bikes to be efficient and a prepped bike has the handlebars turned in the direction of the wheel, the pedals removed

and tied to the frame, seat lowered and any baskets taken off. With the bike now reduced to a low and narrow profile it is ready to be loaded. Bikes are loaded in rows starting at the back with each bike pointed in the opposite direction to its neighbor.

Make sure that you record the number of bikes in each row on a grid, as this is the easiest way to keep count.

You may use particle board or thick cardboard between layers of bicycles to make unpacking easier.

Bikes are loaded three rows on top of each other and spare parts are packed between the bikes as they are loaded.

## Are you sure you want to do this?

Starting a B4H Chapter is a lot of work. The majority of people who enquire about starting a chapter don't go on to do it. Typically, the chapters that don't get off the ground don't have a strong team behind them. Having a group that is committed to making it work is essential. If you think you'll be doing it alone, you might be better to support an existing chapter through fundraising or collecting bikes rather than starting your own.

## Getting help

Organisers of other chapters will be happy to provide you with support if they can, but most are busy people who run their chapters in their spare time. If you don't hear back from other chapters, you can contact one of the people below.

## Contacts

**General enquiries:** Dan Austin, [info@bicycles-for-humanity.org](mailto:info@bicycles-for-humanity.org)

**African partnerships:**  
Michael Linke, [michael@bicycles-for-humanity.org](mailto:michael@bicycles-for-humanity.org)

**Chapter contacts:**  
see [www.bicycles-for-humanity.org](http://www.bicycles-for-humanity.org) 'chapters and partners' in left hand column.

# A quick guide to what we ship to Africa

## What to ship



Mountain bikes with 26 inch wheels are suited to African conditions, with wide, knobby tyres, and spare parts widely available in B4H program countries. Some 24 inch-wheeled mountain bikes, BMX and children's bikes are also acceptable.



Spare parts, mountain bike wheels/tyres and tools, new or used, that are in good working condition (ie not seized up with rust, broken or worn out).

## What NOT to ship

Bicycle frames without wheels (these are costly to build up)

Bicycles with significant damage that are beyond repair. If they are junk in your city they will be junk in Africa

Clothing and shoes (new or used). Shipping these can result in high duty charges and costly customs inspections



Urban commuter and road (also known as 'racing' and 'ten-speed') bikes are great in Amsterdam or on the Tour d'France, but spare parts are not available in most of Africa, and tyres are too narrow for sand and thorns. Without locally available spare parts, most of these bikes quickly become useless junk.



Severely warped wheels, threadbare tyres, stripped frames, and broken spare parts that are junk in your city will end up as junk in Africa. It is far more cost-effective to send them direct to the scrapyards than ship them to Africa.