A new 3D printing method is helping provide quality housing for the developing world.

According to the World Resources Institute’s Ross Center for Sustainable Cities, more than 1 billion people around the world live without adequate housing. Non-profit New Story is one of those working to develop a solution. They have partnered with construction technology company ICON to develop a method for printing single-story houses out of cement. The houses are easy to replicate and can be fully printed in 12 to 24 hours, a fraction of the time it takes for new construction.

The idea of printing a house is not new. But according to Jason Ballard, one of ICON’s founders, other printed houses are either not made on site, or are not attractive. ICON uses a portable Vulcan printer, designed by the company, to construct the houses on site. This makes them a practical solution, even in remote areas. ICON can currently print a 650-square-foot house for USD 10,000. However, the company plans to bring the costs down to just USD 4,000 per house in the future. According to ICON, the printed houses create minimal waste and significantly reduce the labor costs of construction.

ICON have already printed a proof-of-concept house and are currently testing different materials and designs. At the same time, New Story are raising funding to print the first community of 100 homes for families in need in El Salvador. They hope to complete the project in 2019. Then scale up the technology for use by other non-profit organisations around the world. The prospect of printing homes could also allow each community to design its own style of housing without adding to the costs of production. We have seen other innovations that also aim at creating social good, such as
micro-philanthropy and cashless vending machines for the homeless. New Story and ICON are challenging the notion that high tech housing needs to be high-cost. What other innovations might help bring cheaper housing to everyone?

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