



MUKURU PROMOTION CENTRE  
Empowerment Step by Step

“Habari Za  
Kazi Yango”

## February 2015

Greetings:

To show my appreciation for the support that I have and am receiving I wish to keep you up to date with the happenings in my ministry. Hence, **‘Habari Za Kazi Yango’** its Kiswahili for ‘news of my ministry’.

Ten weeks ago I set off for Nairobi which is a distant memory now. There have been many happenings since then and this weekend I decided I needed to write something down otherwise it would be Easter before too long.

When I arrived after Boxing Day, Sr Mary already had a few meetings lined up about schools, land and personnel. My capacity at Mukuru Promotion Centre is to find ways to enhance its operations and management. As many of you would be aware ‘things’ don’t always go to plan when people live in a constant cycle of poverty. If every aspect of the Centre was supervised that would make life much easier and the delivery of services to the poor in the slums would be improved out of sight. Mukuru Promotion Centre was established in 1985 to address the needs of the people in this region which comprises of approximately 300,000 people. There are 4 primary schools: St Catherine’s (1,300 students); St Elizabeth’s (1,400 students); Mukuru Primary (1,400); St Bakhita (1,000 students); and a secondary school, St Michael’s (400 students). There is a vocational skills training centre with courses in hospitality, catering, hairdressing, dress making, computers and information technology. Also there is a Rehabilitation Centre for street boys

(50-60 students) and a medical clinic with a focus on preventative services for the parents and children as well as the normal assistance for patients. Although the Mater hospital is across the road from the Mary Immaculate Clinic the people from the slums do not have the money to pay for basic casualty fees. Regrettably at the end of the day I suppose the hospital needs to pay its bills.

My transition has been made easier because of the 4 months I was here last year. I started lessons in Kiswahili and am slowly picking up a few things. My first attempt at greeting the parishioners at Lunga Lunga parish (St Elizabeth’s school) didn’t really go according to plan. When I greeted the congregation they all laughed, to my surprise. Straight away I thought, ‘heavens what have I said’.



*Lunga Lunga parishioners inside the church*

After checking things out with the experts I was informed that sometimes different places have different meanings to some greetings. So instead of

my intended greeting of 'good morning friends' it was received as 'good morning my lovers'.

The mass went for 2 hours with lots of singing, more singing and dancing and then a little more singing! We were left in no doubt that God was to be praised, praised and praised. Very different from the composed liturgies in Perth.



*The walkway that leads to the Church over the river.*



*The newly built school at Lunga Lunga. St Elizabeth's was constructed by a group of German Entrepreneurs through the German Government.*



*Main gate at St Elizabeth's Lunga Lunga.*

The Germans also erected the new building at Mukuru Primary and are in the process of building St Bakhita Primary school.



*The main thorough fare to get to St Elizabeth's and Mukuru Slums Development Project Training Centre at Lunga Lunga (Sr Barbara Dooley rsm).*

One issue concerning the schools is to retain teaching staff but sadly teachers don't want to teach in the slums and when the opportunity arises they transfer. One way around it would be for the Sisters to actually employ the teachers but of course this requires big sponsorship money. Presently, MPC pay for 9 teachers which is a drop in the ocean. However, if that was reduced then the class sizes would go up to 70-90 children in a class. Some classes actually don't have teachers. At the Mukuru Primary for example the lessons/instructions are written on the blackboard in the morning and the students are expected to adhere to those instructions. The teachers would walk from one classroom to another to keep an eye on the classes.

All primary and secondary teachers must be registered with TSC (Teacher Service Commission). This is the body that pays for the bulk of the teachers.

### **Court Cases**

Another issue that has consumed much time is the Land and Contempt of Court case. Seemingly there are thousands of cases in Kenya where people thought they had title deeds to property only to discover later, that their land had been sold to developers, or squatters have taken possession. The Sisters have been in a legal battle since 2007

about the 4 acres of land opposite the Mater hospital. The County Government in 1991 invited the Sisters to establish a school (St Catherine's) on the land (7 acres) and eventually in April 1993 the school commenced. Maps from 1965 clearly state that the 'disputed land' was government land or public land. This area was designated as 'playing fields' for Mariakani Primary school which is about a kilometre up the road. The playing fields meant that both primary schools could actually share the grounds for students' physical well-being, as we know, all children need to play somewhere.



*The disputed land*

The Minister has stated on national television that any new titles created on public land will be revoked. However, the land cartels are very powerful and won't let this go away. In 1994 the Government created lots of new titles and sold them to representatives who then sold them to developers. The developers sold the titles to others and it seems that it just went on, with the land changing hands several times. At present a developer has sold 59 high-rise apartments 'off the plans' to unsuspecting individuals. This particular area has sewerage pipes underground. Normally, one must get approval from the various government departments - that is another tricky issue. It is perplexing to note that there is no case against the various government departments about their involvement in all of this. Presently, the developer can't start building because the land is in dispute. The developers' claim that the land has been "encroached" upon hence the 'contempt of court'

case – citing that Sr Mary has totally ignored and disregarded the court's ruling. Sr Mary did not hold any office at the school or MPC during this time. As you can see from the photo that there are no permanent structures on the land. There are only a few swings which were erected with the permission of the City Council and Education Department. The truth be told the Sisters have carried out the court's orders – the ones who have a case to answer are the County Council, Education Department and Head Teachers.

To make the issue more complicated the lawyers for the developers have attached to the original land case the contempt charges to Sr Mary, the Principal of St Catherine's and the Chairperson of the Parents committee – all of whom had no involvement. The principal only started work at St Catherine's in January 2015; the chairperson of the parents committee is a slum dweller with little to no education. The case went to the High Court on 9<sup>th</sup> February only to be adjourned to 10<sup>th</sup> March due to the government lawyer not appearing. Some would argue that that was a strategy. In the meantime the costs involved are astronomical. There will be much more to this case before my next newsletter.

In the daily newspaper, 'Nation', articles have appeared criticizing and attributing the blame to Sr Mary. We have since learnt that the President wasn't impressed with the article. He has now intervened through his office, but this could be just for pageantry. At the end of the day Governments don't like to see 'foreigners' involved in domestic issues. Last week the Irish Ambassador requested to be briefed by Sr Mary and her lawyer.

### **Mercy Associates**

During February I facilitated a weekend with 25 men and women Mercy Associates from the Nairobi region. The Mutomo group were not able to attend as they are 5 hours away and the transport costs are always prohibitive. The weekend was held in the suburb of 'Karen' named after Karen Blixen – 'Out of Africa' fame. The area is pleasant with its nice greenery, trees and spaciousness. The venue made

a welcome change to the dry, dusty, high density and tree-less suburb of South B where I live. The Dimesse Sisters (Italian Order) run the retreat centre. By all accounts the Associates enjoyed themselves and want to know the date for the next weekend. The next scheduled gathering will be around Mercy Day.



*(Dimesse Retreat Centre)*



*Participants Dimesse Retreat Centre*

## **DKA & Songa Mbele Projects**

The other places / projects where I have spent some time is DKA (Australian Charity Group) and Songa Mbele Na Masomo. DKA is a major funding partner that supports programs at Mukuru Promotion Centre. Songa Mbele Na Masomo is an informal education centre for children with physical and intellectual disabilities that Mater Dei College has supported over the last couple of years. Songa has a coaching unit for those students from the slums, who for whatever reason, have dropped out of school. The coaching unit tries to get the students back to an acceptable educational level so that they

can be reintegrated into a mainstream school to continue with their education. One of the biggest reason for the drop-outs is poverty. Most of them can't afford to pay for the additional costs for primary education even though the Education Act states that every person has the right to free basic education. Many of you have financially supported some of these children through sponsorship. I am working on creating a database for this particular program as there are high school students from Ireland who also sponsor some children and keeping track of students takes much effort. Unfortunately, the administration side of these places have taken a hit. The staff retention rates are extremely low here in comparison to other places. Getting good honest people is an on-going task. I have conducted lots of interviews for various positions but it's a necessary job to do if we are to keep Mukuru Promotion Centre operating effectively and efficiently.

## **New developments at Songa**

After a few years in the planning, lots of running around, jumping through hoops, the new facility at Songa Mbele was opened in February. Mater Dei College contributed to this project, so I was pleased to be present for the official opening. Now that there is a permanent structure we have a better chance of getting some assistance from government agencies, even if it's a small contribution. I have taken a video of the proceedings and when I get some spare time I'll work on that production.



*Opening of new Special Education Facility at Songa Mbele.  
Building behind dignitaries.*

## **Mukuru Promotion Centre**

We are in the middle of a building stage at Mukuru Promotion Centre. The new buildings include: St Bakhita primary school; St Michael's secondary school and an Administration Office. Hopefully by the end of 2016 the various building stages will be complete. Again the Germans are the major players in the funding and the building foreman is Chinese. As you can imagine, communication is a tough gig. The current buildings are around 20 years old and made of fibre-board and corrugated iron sheets. I suppose in their day they were something to behold. The classrooms don't have much ventilation and no power. Imagine trying to teach in a dark and stuffy room with a class size of between 50-60 students in a nice warm 30+ degree heat, and added to that the difference in altitude of 5,000 feet. The rooms would be no bigger than a normal size classroom in Perth. I have total admiration for the teachers who try and teach in such environments. No doubt the teachers are looking forward to moving into the new buildings.

Life is always exciting as I may know on paper what the arrangements are for the day such as meetings but there is an 80% probability that the day will actually be different.

I hope this gives you a little picture of what I am involved in at MPC. Again I am truly grateful for this opportunity to serve God's poor.

Blessings

Kathy



*A Sunday walk through the slums*