

ASSIGNMENT: CO-ORDINATOR, AUGUST 1999 TO JUNE 2001

Sr. Patricia O'Meara

Nairobi has a population of four million people and it is estimated that 50% of the people live in slums or informal settlements as the Kenyan Government like to call them. Mukuru has a population of over 200,000 people.

Families in Mukuru normally live in one room galvanised structures of 10 foot by 10 foot, which they have rented from landlords who often own up to twenty or thirty of these rooms. Even though landlords exploit the people and the living conditions in the slums are desperate, people continue to pour into the already over-crowded slums in the hope of finding casual work in the nearby factories or security work in the suburbs. People migrate to the cities from the arid and semi-arid areas and from Western Kenya where land division is no longer feasible or possible.

Over-crowding, open sewers, lack of sanitation and poor infrastructure characterise the slums. As a result, tuberculosis, aids, malaria, infected wounds, malnutrition, typhoid, and other water borne diseases are rampant. You also find a high level of social problems such as alcohol abuse, prostitution/child prostitution, child abuse, child labour, aids and violence of all kinds.

It is in this context that Mukuru Promotion centre operate as an umbrella organisation co-coordinating a number of activities all aimed at alleviating the suffering of the poor and empowering them with skills to break the cycle of poverty within which they seem to be trapped. Due to poor living conditions, insecurity of land tenure, and a multiplicity of other factors the people often have very little hope or desire to improve their situation. Luckily Sr. Mary Killeen had the vision to grab land in the slums in the late eighties and early nineties for schools and medical facilities as this would be impossible today. Today the Mukuru villages are happy to have their own schools, even if they are built on black cotton soil and are built of simple galvanised sheets.

Today Mukuru Promotion Centre coordinates the following activities:

Basic education and a lunch each day for four thousand slum/street children

- A residential home for 120 orphaned children
- A curative clinic offering free medical care to slum families
- Home based health care for terminally ill patients and aids/TB patients
- Health education and aids awareness
- Food for destitute families and social work
- A rehabilitation centre for street children
- Community development
- An agricultural project
- Skills training
- Sponsorship to secondary school for poor bright pupils

Insecurity of funding is always a major concern and anxiety for those running Mukuru Promotion Centre. Funding agencies are slow to fund maintenance type projects and yet it is difficult to envisage a project like MPC being sustainable in the near future. However, we are pressurising the Ministry of Education in Kenya to supply schools with teachers thus easing the financial burden for MPC. It is obvious that community involvement and fighting systemic injustice is the easy forward for the future of the project and this we know involves a lot of patience and lobbying.

When I think of MPC I remember fundraising, budgets, proposals, reports, strategic planning, job descriptions, boundaries, endless meetings, financial requests from staff and beneficiaries and many trips to the Lands office to get title deeds for schools plots. The needs grew greater each day yet the budget was reduced. For me it was the best of times and the worst of times! Even though there were moments of anxiety when proposals were rejected I feel it was also a growth period for me as I shared ideas, skills and values with many other development workers. It seemed that divisions and prejudices between religions, age groups, cultures and ethnic backgrounds dissolved as people united to respond to the needs of the poor and destitute.