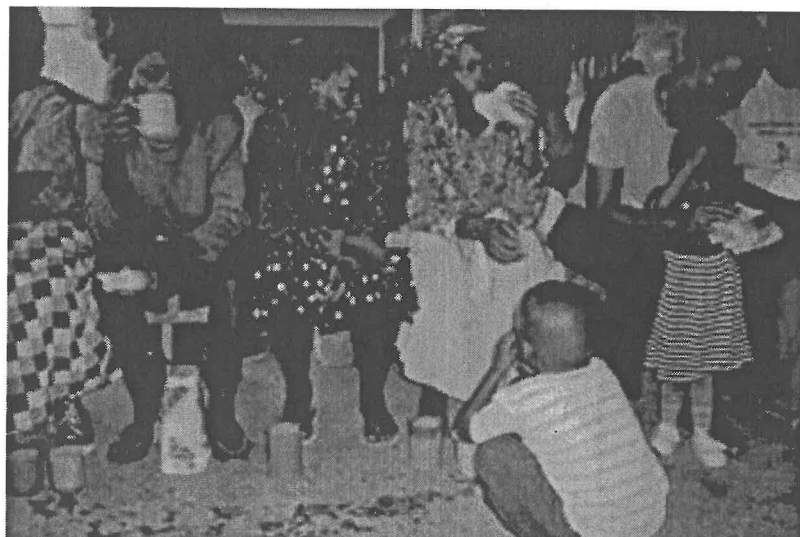


## **7. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Faith-Based Schools**

**CHRISTIANITY. Magdaline Gitahi, Redeemed Gospel Church, Mathare, Kenya**



### **What is the Redeemed Gospel Church Development Programme?**

The Redeemed Gospel Church Development Programme (RGCDP) is a faith-based organization started in 1998 with the aim of addressing the needs of the poor people in the slums. It is the social arm of the Redeemed Gospel Church, founded in 1974 in the slums of Mathare by Bishop Dr A Kitonga. He saw how many slum dwellers were obtaining money through "negative coping means" such as prostitution, alcohol brewing and theft, and realized that there was a need for them to find an alternative after giving their lives to Christ in order for them to continue earning a living and be able to support their families. This resulted to the Bishop introducing social programmes through the church in order to meet with the physical, social and economic needs of the poor as well as their spiritual nourishment.

Currently, the Redeemed Gospel Church has stretched her ministry to nearly every big town within the country and has over 2000 churches world wide, while RGCDP implements social programmes in three main places: the Mathare, Huruma and Korogocho slums of Nairobi. The work is grounded in its belief in a holistic approach to development, which takes into account the spiritual, social, physical and economic needs of people.

### **How many people live in the slums?**

More than 800,000 people live together in the Mathare slums alone, in a mass of unplanned structures. Mathare is just a few minutes car drive from the Nairobi city centre in Kenya, East Africa, yet it offers such a contrast to the comparatively wealthy centre. It is characterized by poor housing, poor sewage systems, inadequate health and schooling facility, high crime rate, high HIV/AIDS infection rates, high child mortality, malnutrition, prostitution and unemployment. People have come from various parts of the country leading to a great variation in cultural beliefs, practices and values.

### **How do people access water in Mathare?**

There are standpipes 300 meters apart. People have to queue with their 20 litre water containers for which they pay 2 Kenyan shillings. Water sellers in the slums have to pay a monthly fee to the local government in order to have a continued supply from the mains. This is paid according to a meter reading.

Outside Nairobi, people might have to travel more than 10 km for water sometimes, especially in Central Kenya and especially in the dry season. In many cases the fetching of water is done by women and children except where men are living alone. Water is carried on the back supported by a strap held on the head. Where distance are vast, donkeys are used where available and will carry four 20 litre containers; two each side.

### **What is RGCDP'S vision?**

The vision is to have a society without poverty, injustice and where people co-exist peacefully and children are facilitated to develop their full potential.

### **What is RGCDP's mission statement?**

RGCDP exists to address the physical, social, spiritual and economic needs of vulnerable people in the slums of Mathare, Huruma and Korogocho, especially children, women and youths, through active participation and empowerment.

#### **How does RGCDP achieve this?**

RGCDP has six specific projects:

1. **Child sponsorship:** Poor children are given money for school fees, uniforms and books.
2. **Health and Nutrition:** malnourished children are fed with a balanced diet and their parents/guardians are taught how to prepare the food through demonstration. The project involves a nutrition demonstration kitchen, a health clinic, a full HIV/AIDS programme (with voluntary counselling and testing services, prevention of mother-child transmission, home-based care and support for vulnerable children), and the training of Community Health Workers on teaching the community on general hygiene, family planning, and other health issues
3. **Primary/Secondary schools**
4. **Community empowerment**
5. **Vocational Training: largely in computers and hairdressing**
6. **Relief**

#### **Why is the Church filling this Government role?**

The Kenyan government is not effectively addressing the needs of its people by putting policies in place to care for the poor. Therefore churches and NGOs need to fulfil that role. In addition, the poor in the slum do not know their rights and the church has to take up the responsibility of explaining these to them. The church is within the community and this means that we are on the ground: we cannot turn a blind eye to the needs of those that we are serving.

#### **How does the church fund its outreach ministry?**

The Redeemed Gospel Church is funded by donors and well-wishers for its Outreach work. Most funding comes through Kenya-based NGOs, including Compassion International, MAP International and PATHFINDER International. Funding also comes from the Netherlands. The money is used to support the pastors and also for spiritual outreaches like crusades. A small amount comes from the weekly collection by the congregation, however this is comparatively small, since most church members come from within the slums and have very low incomes or no incomes at all.

#### **What is the meaning of water in the context of the Christian faith and tradition?**

The Redeemed Gospel Church believes in the saying that "Water is Life". In the book of Revelation 21; 6 we read: "And he said to them, it is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely." In chapter 22;1 we read that: "He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and of the lamb"; and in verse 17 that: "The spirit and the bride says come and let him that is thirsty come and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. In these scriptures, water symbolizes Christ.

John 4:10, Jesus talked of living water when asked for water by the Samaritan woman. In this instance, He was referring to Himself as having water of life and that whoever drinks Him will not thirst again. When the Lord Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the good news, He also commanded that whoever believes and is saved, should be baptized by being immersed in water as a symbol of dying and resurrecting with Him.

### **What is the hygiene and sanitation situation?**

RGC use a holistic approach involving people's spiritual, physical, economic and social needs. It is not possible to have good physical health in the absence of clean water. Cleanliness is vital in the prevention of many kinds of infections. Personal cleanliness (hygiene) and public cleanliness (sanitation) are both important.

In the slums, toilets are few and this means that one has to walk for quite a distance to access one. Some cost 5 Kenyan shillings per visit, to cover the cost of someone keeping them clean, but many find this too expensive. Due to security and cost reasons, many are forced to use plastic bags as an alternative, and then they throw them into dumping sites, trenches or into the rivers. Many people relieve themselves in a corner of the narrow streets while children can be seen relieving themselves at the garbage sites, even during the daytime. Some toilets are built by the river with the affluent flowing straight in, which adds to pollution and increased risk of disease. There are no built-up drainage systems in the slums – resulting in wastewater finding its own way, through trenches filled with dirty stagnant effluent. This also becomes a source of diseases especially for the little children who play in and around the dirty water.

Scarcity of water leads to inadequate hygiene. Many children attend school while dirty - leading to low self-esteem. At times, the children studies are affected due to the time they take to fetch for water which in most cases has big queues. Children also learn in dirty classrooms, which are washed once or twice a week due to scarcity of water.

Some people in the slum will bath and wash their clothes only once a week in order to save on the cost. You also find that utensils are not rinsed in clean water.

Currently, there is a big problem of water in the country and the government has resulted to rationing it where it is available. Most estates in the city of Nairobi are now getting water either once or twice a week. In other places the water dried over one year ago and they have to fetch for it though they have taps in their homes.

### **How are girls affected?**

Girls are greatly affected, especially when they are undergoing menstrual periods. There are no disposal facilities for sanitary towels and as a result they sometimes keep used towels in their school bags or throw them down the toilets causing them to block. In most cases, they do not even afford the towels and they result in using whatever piece of cloth is around them clean or not clean. Most parents cannot afford to buy sanitary towels on a monthly basis.

### **What is the church sharing with young people?**

As a church organization, we have been conveying the message of importance of clean water, hygiene and adequate sanitation to the young people:

- Boiling water before drinking or using chlorine tabs and ensuring that containers/cups used for drawing or keeping water are clean.
- General house cleaning. Since family members are in close contact it is very easy to spread germs and illness. It is even more important to keep the house clean when there is a sick person because sickness reduces the body's immune system and ability to protect itself from even ordinary illness. The objective here is to maintain good hygiene so as to prevent the spread of infection and make the house a pleasant place to live in.
- Throw away leftover food in a proper way.
- Always keeping food covered.
- Not to spit on the floor and when coughing or sneezing to cover your mouth with your hand or piece of cloth and later wash your hands.
- Importance of washing hands before and after eating.
- Importance of washing hands after visiting toilets.
- We conduct environmental cleanliness with them at least thrice a year- during school holidays

#### **How does the church train Community Health Workers?**

The church has also been involved in training some community members as Community Health Workers;

- Teaching the community on general and body hygiene
- General environmental cleanliness. This includes keeping the surrounding clean by sweeping and collecting garbage and burning them in a pit.
- Referring the sick to hospital before it is late.
- Advising the community on the importance of eating well to prevent sickness

#### **How can I learn more?**

<http://www.redeemedgospel.org/>