

GIVING YOUTH A SPORTING CHANCE

The Mathare Youth Project, Nairobi, Kenya



Introduction

Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) provides a unique model for community development which, over the last twenty years, has been used by other community groups and NGOs throughout Kenya and in other 'developing' countries.

Mathare Valley, with a population of 180,000 crammed into an area just 2 kilometres by 300 metres, is the oldest of Nairobi's slums. Situated less than 5km from the centre of Nairobi, it is part of the bigger Mathare slum area. The Mathare Youth Sports Association is a self-help youth programme which has forged a unique relationship between sport (mainly soccer) and community development—demonstrating the remarkable capacity of even the poorest youth to organise their own sports leagues, and contribute to the development of their community.

MYSA is run for and by the youth themselves. It currently operates in 16 zones with a registration of 735 boys' teams and 294 girls' teams and 124 different leagues, with a total membership of over 17,000 youth and volunteers. Each year more than 10,500 league matches are played.

MYSA teams also participate in slum cleanups and other community-based activities, earning six points in the league standings for each community project completed. In addition to playing soccer, players from all Mathare teams (including the Mathare United professional team, Mathare Youth FC and Mathare United Women—now among the top and most popular teams in Kenya) are also trained and active field workers on AIDs prevention. Most of the hundreds of volunteer MYSA leaders, coaches and referees are 14—18 years old.

Child labour and non-attendance at school in Mathare Valley

Mathare Valley lacks even adequate basic amenities such as water, roads, health and sanitary facilities with education being an area of particular disadvantage. Because of the inadequate provision of government schools, private informal primary schools are used. 22,500 children are in Mathare's formal schools with 25,000 pupils in the non-formal sector. (*source: Kenya Non-Formal Schools Association*).

Pupils in government schools receive government assistance through the Free Primary Education (FPE) programme. Pupils in non-formal schools, however, have to pay school fees. Due to the high poverty levels many children have been pushed out of school due to lack of school fees. 50,000 children in Mathare are currently out of school.

Many of the children not attending school are AIDS orphans, forced to drop out of school to join the world of work at an early age: working in such hazardous jobs as night barmaids, street hawkers and rag pickers—foraging through unhygienic dumpsites to collect tin cans, bottles and other recyclables. Other children not attending school have been sent out to the streets by their parents to sell boiled maize, peanuts, sweets and other merchandise.

The income generated by working children is used to feed members of their families. By being denied access to education, these children are condemned to a vicious cycle of poverty and hopelessness. In time, many become hardened by street life and eventually become drug dependant and alcohol addicts. This is how many of them end up in police cells and children's remand homes.

Since 1987 MYSA has successfully worked through sports to influence behaviour change and build a sense of hope and resilience among the youth of their communities. Through MYSA, a number of professional sports men and women have emerged out of urban slums.





MYSA/ACLAIM

BACK TO SCHOOL PROJECT

Aclaim is now seeking funding of €20,000 to facilitate MYSA to implement a programme which will

- Create awareness on worst forms of child labour through tournaments, leagues and workshops
- Mobilize the community and sensitise them about worst forms of child labour
- Withdraw and prevent 90 children from worst forms of child labour and return them to school

MYSA will use the skills and experience gained working with the youth in the slums to create an awareness of the worst forms of child labour in a manner that will provoke community action.

MYSA will also work to establish a model youth mobilization strategy that can be replicated in other anti-child labour programmes. To achieve these objectives MYSA will undertake the following activities

1. MYSA Tournament and League

MYSA will organise a soccer tournament and league to create awareness on worst forms of child labour. Trainings for the children will also be done at the start and at the end of the programme. During the tournament and league the target group will be the parents and the children.

2. Education

The affected children will be taken to school through a scholarship programme. For the children who will attend government schools, only uniforms and books will be required since primary education is free. School fees will have to be paid for children who attend non-governmental schools.

3. Outreach programmes

Outreach programmes will be held by the MYSA Haba na Haba group to mobilise and sensitise the community on worst forms of child labour.

A detailed breakdown of the costings of this project is available from *Aclaim*

Find out more about MYSA by visiting their website <http://www.mysakenya.org>

***Aclaim*—who we are**

Aclaim is an Irish-based charity committed to the eradication of child labour throughout the world.

Our main objectives are

- To raise public awareness of child labour
- To assist with projects aimed at the elimination of child labour

Since 2003 *Aclaim* has been working in support of two anti-child labour projects in India – South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) and The Child Trust. *Aclaim* is currently funding an outreach programme for The Child Trust in Ferozabad, Uttar Pradesh.

We have recently decided to fund this project being run by the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA). We are currently raising funds to meet this commitment. We hope you can help us.



Aclaim Bank account Allied Irish Bank, Templeogue, Dublin 6W. Account no. 15374093, sort code 933457
Aclaim website www.aclaim.ie is currently under construction