



The Year that was 2020

Dear Friends

One year ago in March, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic and turned all of our lives upside down. A hug went from a warm greeting to a health hazard. We were forced to separate from friends and family; we lost friends and family.

The numbers are staggering, but statistics and case counts will never truly measure the pandemic's toll on communities across the globe. Those we've lost can never be replaced.

Yet even amid the uncertainty, heartbreak, and fear of the past twelve months, moments of compassion shine through. From the stories of individual heroes to the power of collective milestones, our timeline honours the hardships and highlights the hope of a year in times of a pandemic.

In a special way, we give thanks to friends for coming through in these difficult times. Thank you for being part of this story of hope that you help us write every time you open one of our emails, every time you share our work with others and every time you make a gift through various platforms.

Asante sana and we hope to continue our journey with you – 2021

Signed

Cathal Conaty

Signed

Susi Kerschbaumer

Mathare Children Fund panairobi {MCFp}

MCFP'S BEGINNINGS: The Mathare Children's Fund panairobi {MCFp} was founded in the year 1999 to bridge the gap between children's rehabilitation programmes and the need for sustainable solutions towards educational and livelihood supports.

OUR VISION: *"A Society where Basic Needs of All Children are met, and Children's Rights are Respected and Upheld"*.

OUR MISSION: *"To support, promote and secure children's rights to education, food, health and general well-being, especially in resource-constrained areas, through empowering participatory processes and community outreach"*.

MCFP'S SETTINGS: MCFp is situated in Mathare informal settlements, three miles east of Nairobi City's Central Business District {CBD}. Mathare slum is home to over 450,000 people - in an area of two by three miles. Because of congestion, heightened poverty and limited opportunities, survival is a daily struggle against the backdrop of disease, drugs and alcohol, crime, sexual and gender violence, a high burden of unintended pregnancies, prostitution and a high incidence of delinquent and lawless behaviour.

MCFP'S BENEFICIARIES: Our primary target group comprises of children and teenage mothers affected by high levels of risk/vulnerability, predominantly within Mathare and other resource-constrained and densely populated informal settlements around Mathare.

MCFP'S PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES: Our programmes are designed to enable children and teenage mothers to rise above the mire of despondency and despair occasioned by the profusion of risk and marginalising factors found in the resource-constrained and densely populated informal settlements.

MCFP'S AND CHILD SAFE GUARDING AND PROTECTION: Being a Child Rights Organization, MCFp has put Child Safe Guarding and Protection being at the core of its programmes.

Corona Virus

The impact of Coronavirus continues to be felt in every home and workplace. While the cessation of movement into and out of Nairobi Metropolitan Area, among Counties were lifted after October, the nationwide 9pm to 4am curfew was extended until foreseeable future while schools/learning institutions remain closed until January 2021.

Too many children, especially those living in fragile contexts like Mathare, already faced unacceptable threats to their wellbeing and futures. Beyond COVID-19 itself, children faced heightened food insecurity; increased risk of violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation; and the interruption or total breakdown of essential services including formal and informal education.

While children may not suffer the worst symptoms of COVID-19, millions of young lives have been put at risk as weak health systems become overwhelmed by the pandemic and precious resources are diverted. Our health systems are ill-prepared, and they have inherent challenges in reaching those most in need.

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on MCFp Projects



MCFp
Member of Staff participates in a COVID-19 Sensitization and Mass Testing Exercise in Mathare Informal Settlements

Depressing economic times such as the one presented by the COVID-19 pandemic heighten vulnerability for children/girls in slums and other resource-constrained neighbourhoods, including rural areas. In such times, sexual exploitation of adolescent girls may occur in the absence of “*safe spaces for women and girls*”; the girls may be coerced to trade sex in exchange for food, and even protection. Such resource-constrained and densely populated settlements and neighbourhoods; heightened poverty and limited opportunities; a high incidence of violence, alcohol, drugs, transactional sex, sexual coercion/abuse, etc.; and a high burden of disease are characteristic of the catchment area from which we mobilise the beneficiaries of our programmes.

Following the confirmation of a case of COVID-19 infection in Kenya on March 12, 2020, the government issued directives on stay-at-home, social-distance, lockdown, travel ban and other safety measures. This caught many individuals and institutions off-guard, led to a near-paralysis in the provision of some services, and created challenges for both MCFp and beneficiaries. Though some COVID-19 related challenges are captured in other sections, a few other notable challenges include:

GETTING OUR CHILDREN HOME: The abrupt closure of all schools and institutions of learning in the country on 16th of March, 2020 meant that all of MCFp’s School Sponsorship Programme children in all categories of learning had to return home.

SOCIAL DISTANCE IN THE WORKPLACE: Workplaces were requested to observe MOH/WHO guidelines on preventing spread of the virus and to shut down non-essential services. At MCFp Offices, therefore, we came up with a system whereby different members of staff would report to work on different working days to enhance social distance among the staff and clients. This went on until, eventually, we opened up when the infection rates started coming down and the directives on gatherings were relaxed.

LOSS OF LIVELIHOODS: A good number (above 60%) of the parents/guardians of our beneficiaries residing in the slums whose major source of income is through washing clothes {as Live-Out Domestic Workers} could no longer get employed because clients feared contracting COVID-19.

LACK OF BASICS: Children of most of these category of parents/guardians went without food and other essential basic needs e.g. house rent became a major challenge; parents was evicted from their house. Due to lack of food and activities to keep them engaged, some of the children in our program started roaming the streets in a bid to find food.

RELOCATION TO “THE VILLAGES” {RURAL AREAS}: A guardian decided to relocate a child to the village after the boy started sleeping out in the streets; the guardian was afraid that the boy might disappear altogether in the streets. A family of five with a single parent relocated to the village when the mother could no longer meet the family essential needs.

LACK OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT & POOR HYGIENE AND SANITATION PRACTICES: Majority of the vulnerable families living in informal settlements could hardly afford a face mask {the prices had shot up in the initial days}, let alone afford to buy enough water and soap for regular hand-washing. Due to the high population density, even maintaining social distance was a challenge. Access to personal protective equipment {PPEs}, and observing of hygiene and sanitation practices was not a priority, since finding a single meal a day had become much more challenging.

LACK OF CHILD SUPERVISION AFTER SCHOOLS’ CLOSURE: After a long stay at home due to the coronavirus pandemic, one of the children whose risk level is very high re-joined the peers he had left in the streets on joining MCFp’s School Sponsorship Program. At one time he was arrested by the police together with a friend; he was released following our intervention. The boy lives with his grandmother who is aged and blind. Another boy to went back to the streets and is yet to be traced while the sister is said to have left the children’s home where she was staying with her brother.

LACK OF GIRL CHILD SUPPORT STRUCTURES AND TEEN PREGNANCIES: Across the country, a number of school-going girls become pregnant due to inability to access basic personal necessities e.g. sanitary towels, among others. In the absence of the intervention, some men

were befriending school girls from poor households and providing them with basic needs in exchange for sex. Some of the girls got pregnant through premarital and unprotected sex with their boyfriends. Unfortunately 3 school going girls of the children in MCFp's School Sponsorship Program have been affected by these cases of early pregnancy but we are monitoring their situations and it's our hope they will report back to school in 2021.

PERMANENT CLOSURE OF SOME PRIVATE SCHOOLS: Due to prolonged closure, some private schools ceased their operations altogether; they could not find funds to pay rent and teachers' salaries, which are necessary to keep the institutions running. It is our hope that all institutions in which MCFp's School Sponsorship Program beneficiaries are placed will be fully operational in 2021.

Actions Adopted to Mitigate Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

We adopted several mitigate measures to cushion the impacts of COVID-19 related challenges:

GETTING OUR CHILDREN HOME: Monies were remitted to all MCFp's School Sponsorship Program children in boarding schools for transport to their respective homes when the schools and campuses/colleges were abruptly closed. Many parents could not raise the bus fare within such short notice; the intervention, therefore, was necessary.

SCALING DOWN AND PRIORITISATION OF ACTIVITIES AT OUR CENTRE: We scaled down our activities in the MCFp facility; we only attended to those with an issue that couldn't wait, e.g. referral to the hospital, physical abuse cases, and such other priorities. Parents' meetings, which are normally held quarterly, were suspended.

FOLLOW UPS, REFERRALS AND OTHER INTERVENTIONS: As far as was possible, we constantly followed up on the welfare of our beneficiaries and their families and the general community. Incidences of SGBV, abuse, malnutrition, ill health and appropriate interventions, including medical referrals, implemented. Within the children/teenage mother's families we serve, more than 54 children had malnourished issues, 59 cases of abuses from sexual abuse, assault or Gender Based Violence and more than 109 visited a medical facility due to malaria, diarrhea, dysentery, malnutrition, typhoid, among other infections.

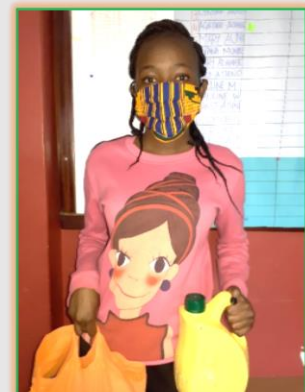
FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND FACE MASKS' USAGE:



Food Packaged for Distribution



David



Sheila

It was mandatory for beneficiaries to wear No child was allowed to pick foodstuffs without masks; encouraging mask usage in that manner was a safety-enhancing strategy for our beneficiaries.

The food distribution intervention was a success as it kept our vulnerable beneficiaries residing in the city safe. The intervention was deemed necessary and urgent after we had noticed some scavenging for food; prompt action was required lest some beneficiaries end up engaging in illicit activities or being exposed to abuse and exploitation. The food also benefited other extended members of the children's families, including parents/guardians who lost their source of livelihood. The food baskets were provided every week or two weeks for 480 households. Over 3,800 disposable and 2137 reusable masks made and distributed to children and teenage mothers and their families; the labour needs of making the masks was met by teenage mothers, providing them with some earnings.



TEMPERATURE CHECK & DISINFECTION: We introduced a touchless temperature gun; everyone coming to the centre had to undergo temperature check and requisite sanitation protocol; a member of staff was assigned to monitor adherence to the process. A hand washing station was set up at the main entrance. Social distancing stickers were/are in place. MCFp member of staff does temperature check, and disinfection at the main entrance to the centre, respectively.



Sanitation Protocol

Temperature Check

DEMYSTIFYING COVID-19: To demystify COVID-19 and to counter negative information, MCFp staff participated in a sensitization campaign and mass testing of the COVID-19 in the slums of Mathare. Pamphlets with simplified COVID-19 messages/information were also distributed to beneficiaries and the wider community; the pamphlets were produced by MCFp in English and Kiswahili. One member of MCFp staff also gave an interview in one of the national TV stations regarding the low turnout for COVID-19 testing.

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS OF GIRLS: Free sanitary pads' distribution was done every month - from March to December - to the benefit of all girls coming to MCFp's Community Library and other girls from the slums.

ESTABLISHED A TWO-WAY DIALOGUE: MCFp was able to establish a two-way dialogue with community members at all levels (including children youth and women) where we sort to

understand their perspectives, solicits their inputs, understand and address their fears, ask questions (and have them answered), and engaged them in the response to Covid- 19.

CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION: Provision of psychosocial support and respond to violence and abuse of children is something we are keen in by supporting the survivors and reporting those that are involved. The closure of schools saw an increase in teenage and adolescent pregnancies. Stigma and discriminatory school rules are likely to prevent these girls from continuing with their education once schools re-open.

ADVOCACY: We lend our voice to advocate for the establishment of government-run safe houses where girls at risk of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence could seek refuge, during holidays and unforeseen circumstances like what we are experiencing today with the pandemic. Over the last 1 year, we saw an increased risk of sexual exploitation of children, including sex for assistance, commercial sexual, exploitation of children and forced early marriages. Case in point - More than 28 girls on average became pregnant daily in Machakos County in the first five months of the lock-down

SAFE SPACE: We provided a safe space where children could undertake studies that schools since schools were not opened, an environment that is conducive, a study room that is well spaced in accordance with the new Covid-19 Restrictions and up to date curriculum books. We served approximately 18 at anyone given time.



While it may look gloomy, we take this opportunity to share with you an overview/outcomes over the past year in the different projects that we run.

1. Sponsorship Program

The School Sponsorship Program supports learning aspirations of former street children affected by high levels of vulnerability to whatever level of education they can attain. Every year when funds are available, fresh recruitment is done to replace beneficiaries exiting the program. The program also addresses some non-academic needs of the vulnerable children and offers limited support to their families in the informal settlements and other resource constrained areas to ensure that the children access and benefit from education.

- Over 850 children have been through the School Sponsorship Programme since 1999, when MCFp was founded. To date, up to 480 former beneficiaries who have exited the programme, are gainfully employed, and are taking care of their families.

- **Currently**, there are **93 children** benefiting from the School Sponsorship Programme at all levels of education; from kindergarten level to tertiary level. The 93 children are **placed in around 70 schools and institutions** of learning in various parts of the country. A summary of 2020 school sponsorships is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Children in School Sponsorship Programme

LEVEL OF EDUCATION/ SCHOOL CATEGORY	NUMBER OF CHILDREN
• Special School	1
• Kindergarten	2
• Primary School	47
• Secondary School	25
• Campus / College / Vocational Training	17
Total Number of Sponsored Children	93

- The School Sponsorship Programme supports educational aspirations of the children to whatever level of education they can attain. Therefore, though the beneficiaries are collectively referred to as *Children*, those in tertiary institutions of learning and some of those in secondary school have already attained the age of majority – above 18 years.

Academic Success and other related stories

Transition to secondary school:

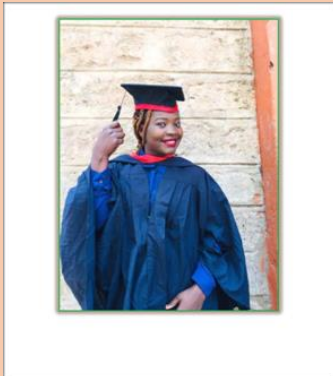
6 beneficiaries of MCFp's School Sponsorship Programme sat for Kenya Certificate of Primary Education {KCPE} exams in 2019. They all graduated and went on to join high school in January, 2020. Four of the beneficiaries were sponsored to join a boarding high school, and the other two joined a day high school - in Nairobi and in Migori County respectively. The distinction between beneficiaries sponsored to join boarding high schools and beneficiaries sponsored to join day high schools is based on the attainment of the minimum grade requirement set by MCFp so as to encourage children to work harder in school. NB: boarding schools are very expensive.

College/campus graduates:

8 beneficiaries of MCFp's School Sponsorship Programme qualified to graduate in various disciplines at various levels in the year 2020. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, graduation ceremonies were scheduled for 2021. Only 2 of the beneficiaries were able to participate in graduation ceremonies in December, 2020; one of the universities held an innovative virtual graduation ceremony. The respective disciplines and levels that the beneficiaries qualified for are:



- **Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Business Administration, HRM.** *NB this shows that beneficiaries of the School Sponsorship Programme are capable of achieving education’s highest accolade.*



- **Bachelor’s Degree in Purchasing and Supply Management**

- **Bachelor of Arts {BA} Degree from Moi University.** The graduation ceremony was deferred to 2021.
- **Bachelor of Arts {BA} Degree from Maseno University.** The graduation ceremony was deferred to 2021.
- **Diploma in Procurement Chain Management**
- **Diploma in Hospitality Management.**
- 2 beneficiaries qualified for **Certificate in Supply Chain Management**

School sponsorship alumni “giving back”:

An alumnus of the School Sponsorship Programme made a pledge to MCFP in the year 2019; to sponsor a child under the School Sponsorship Programme. A girl child was identified, and our alumnus has continued to pay her fees moving forward.

As sanitation is a major problem in informal settlements, another of our alumnus used his resources to renovate a community washroom to help boost communal hygiene at this time of COVID-19 pandemic. *NB; the washroom serves the community in the locality he grew up, and from where he was recruited from the streets by the School Sponsorship Programme.* In the spirit

of giving back, the alumnus has also pledged to support university education for his younger sister from 2021.

Exchange program leads to support for higher education: A School Sponsorship Programme beneficiary who participated a student's council exchange program in 2019 will have her university education being funded, through MCFp, by the family that hosted her when she in Germany. The beneficiary will be able to study for a degree in International Diplomacy and Disaster Management at Mt Kenya University from 2021.

School-Oriented Issues and Challenges

As with other years, MCFp addressed various school-oriented issues; from when the schools opened in January, 2020, to when they were closed in Mid-March, 2020 following a directive related to checking the spread of coronavirus. Schools' closure and the partial re-opening of schools and academic institutions on October, 2020 also generated unanticipated challenges. Some of the issues and challenges that we faced and helped address include:

- School Closure due to Strike by Students – we had two cases of school strikes but fortunately none of our sponsored kids were involved in planning or participated in the destruction of property in their respective schools.
- School Bullying – they were a few cases (8) of bullying that were reported to the staff but we were able to intervene on behalf of our sponsored kids. Unfortunately, in many instances, school officials deal with incidents of bullying much too late. By the time intervention occurs, the psychological damage and pain has become almost indelible. There is need for bullying to be addressed swiftly.
- Family-Coerced Class Repetition: Some of the challenges we face are unique in nature. MCFp does not encourage class repetition. Children are made aware of this the moment they are recruited into the program. The government banned class repetition, but it continues to be used as an intervention strategy to better the grades.
- Schools' Closure and the Challenges of E-Learning: After the abrupt nationwide closure of institutions of learning, plans were laid to develop e-learning and virtual and Skype graduation ceremonies that would enable achievement of such academic milestones as graduation, final exams and progress to the next class and for those still in school or college. However, the plans were never actualized by the Ministry of Education. As a result, anxiety was high amongst students, especially those in their final year of primary or secondary school education, who felt that everything that they worked for was gone. Eventually the students came to terms with the effects of COVID-19; they became aware that the situation affected all students on the country.

- Partial Re-Opening of Schools as Coronavirus Infection Rates Decreased: Students in institutions of higher education were recalled on 5th October, 2020 for examination purpose. Some of the institutions of higher learning later adopted e-learning; this commenced on 2nd of November, 2020. Primary school pupils who are in Standard 4 and Standard 8 respectively and secondary school learners in Form 4 were recalled, and national exams scheduled for April 2021. The reopening date for all the other class was scheduled for 4th January, 2021. NB MCFp's *School Sponsorship Programme successfully paid the school fees of the children who reported back to school after the selected classes were recalled.*

Community Library



Children in the Library

After schools were closed on March, we had to keep the library open to help children meet learning and other developmental needs. From March to December, 2020, therefore, children who wished to study would use the library. ***Library attendance was between 26 to 27 children every day***, with priority being given to our beneficiaries. Though the library's capacity is much larger, the number was limited to enable observation of social distance. Attendance was rotational so that all the children would get an equal chance of accessing the library.

2. Students' Councils/Parliament

Students selected to participate in the student's council exchange program in Germany in 2020 were unable to travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The trip was deferred to 2021. NB MCFp *has been working with a number of schools to promote the implementation of the Students' Council as a stakeholder in schools' decision-making structures. It is from these schools that the students that are to travel to Germany are selected.*

3. Teenage Mothers Program

PROGRAMME BACKGROUND: In Kenya, nearly 18 percent of adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are mothers. Chronic poverty and limited opportunities predispose adolescents living in resource-constrained and densely populated informal settlements like Mathare to

becoming teenage mothers. Being an organisation that promotes and protects children's rights, we were cognizant that the crisis of having a baby during adolescence, coupled with the struggle to eke a living in resource-constrained neighbourhoods, traps teenage mothers and their children in cycles of chronic poverty. Parenting is difficult for teen mothers as they lack life experience, skills, maturity, and economic security to cater for their children's physical and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, in the year 2012, MCFp initiated a Teenage Mothers Programme to equip teenage mothers with parenting, vocational and other life skills; a programme whose exit strategy would translate to sustainable livelihoods for teenage mothers and better life prospects for their children. The Teenage Mothers' Program identifies children below 5 years of age primarily from Mathare and its environments, whose mothers are below 19 years of age. Expectant teens are also identified and co-opted into the programme. Most of the beneficiaries are between 17 and 18 years of age, with the older ones being 19 years of age. Average level of education of the beneficiaries is Primary School, but several happen to be in Secondary School when unintended pregnancies disrupt their education.

ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE INCEPTION: Between 2012 when the teenage mothers programme begun, and December, 2020, **over 432 teenage mothers** have been recruited into the project. Out of the number, 371 **{86%}** graduated successfully and are either employed or self-employed while two have gone back to school and graduated with degrees.

2020 – (13th Class) RECRUITMENT OF TEENAGE MOTHERS & OUTCOMES: **30 teenage mothers were recruited in January, 2020.** However, the stay-at-home and social distance directives that entailed restrictions on gatherings interrupted trainings and related interventions. The trainings resumed later in the year when some of the restrictions were relaxed and we had met the Ministry of Health stipulated guidelines. Thus, it was not possible to recruit a second group of beneficiaries as has been the case over the years. Of the 30 teenage mothers, **26 {around 87%} successfully completed the course** and were issued with a certificate, despite COVID-19 related challenges.

8 teenage mothers from the garment-making class have been attached to EPZ for their internship, after which they will get employed. While the rest, who are from the cosmetology class, are either self-employed or employed.

OTHER INTERVENTIONS DONE FOR THE "CLASS OF 2020" TEENAGE MOTHERS:

- When the lockdown was in effect, we had to carry out case follow-ups aimed at evaluating the progress of the teenage mothers and their children through referral partners and even through parents/guardians. The collaboration was effective and holds promise for future follow up mechanisms.



: Teenage Mothers in Life Skills Class

- As exchange programmes with similar teenage other programmes were not possible, we organised 5 open forums in the course of 2020. The open forum is a platform that gives room for a dialogue between the parents, social workers, trainers and teenage mothers with the aim of discussing the challenges in terms of performance progress, achievements and solutions that are meant to propel the beneficiary's performance and the programme to a higher level.
- Provision of medical care for all teenage mothers and their children was also part of the interventions. Through our Healthcare Service Provider partners such as German Doctors, SHOFCO, Prolife and Mathare North Hospital, we enabled all teenage mothers in the program to access requisite medical services, including vaccinations for the children.
- After the stay-at-home directive was eased, the teenage mothers and their children were taken for check up by a nutritionist. NB: We had been unable to provide nutritional support other than food baskets during the lockdown at a time when the country's economy, especially the informal economy that many residents of informal settlements depend on, was hard hit by the COVID pandemic.
- 41 children from the teenage mother's between the ages of 7 months and 5 years were diagnosed with various cases of malnutrition. The children with malnutrition cases were referred to German Doctors' Nutrition Unit. 8 of the children were introduced to food supplements while the rest had their mothers being enrolled into the feeding program.
- We managed to get 17 teenage mothers secure cash transfers from Save The Children and World Food Program. These teenage mothers whose children were diagnosed with high levels of malnutrition secured a six months' financial support of Ksh.5000 (\$50). Out of the Ksh.5000, the girls saved Ksh.1000 each month; savings that enabled the girls to buy a few items for small business start-ups after graduation from the project.

4. Social Enterprise - Reusable Sanitary Pads & Heart Bags

MCFp registered a Social Enterprise that manufactures reusable sanitary pads and ladies' handbags {"Heart Bags"}. In December, 2020, we submitted MCFp Reusable Sanitary Pads – both light flow and heavy flow pads – for quality assurance testing based on ISO International organisation of standardization test methods; both light flow and heavy flow pads are Compliant on the tested parameters as per the Kenyan standard/East African Standard Specification for Sanitary Towels.



MCFp Reusable Sanitary Pads



Heart Bags

The reusable pads come in a package of four pieces: - two for normal flow and two for heavy flow. The package also includes a purse to carry fresh reusable sanitary towels a waterproof bag to carry the used cloths pads while out and about; 3 pairs of panties; and bars of soap. One cloths pad should not be used them for more than three months; therefore, a package of 4 cloths pads will last for one year. On the right are ladies' handbags {"heart bags"}.

On account of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was limited reusable pads business – both production and sales – in 2020. However, we managed to mobilise grants that enabled free distribution of MCFp Reusable Sanitary Pads to over 1300 girls. We have also tendered to several organizations and we hope that sales will improve in 2021. Sales and production of "heart bags" were also limited in 2020; sold less than 30.

NB the social enterprise provides livelihood options for a few of the teenage mothers exiting the Teenage Mothers' Programme. Thus, the slump in business also affected the welfare of teenage mothers who would have eked a living from the ventures.

5. Sexual & Reproductive Health Interventions/Life Skills Education

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS EDUCATION/INTERVENTIONS: More than one thousand {1000} teenage girls in various schools and 31 teenage mothers benefitted from SRHR education that included such topics as Family Planning, Safe Motherhood, Menstrual Hygiene Management, HIV/AIDs & STI Prevention, etc. 4 teenage girls from the schools which took part in the training and 14 teenage mothers reported cases of related to sexually transmitted infections. The 14 young mothers were referred to German Doctors for treatment, while the 3 teenage school girls were referred to hospitals nearby their schools for treatment while one was brought to the German Doctors for consultation.

DISTRIBUTION OF MCFP REUSABLE SANITARY PADS IN BOMET COUNTY: In September, 2019 a young girl committed suicide after, allegedly, being shamed in class for having her periods and staining her uniform. The story, which went viral in social media, prompted MCFpanairobi to approach some well-wishers about supporting a community-wide exercise that would empower school going adolescent girls and, at the same time, create awareness on menstrual hygiene as a health issue. 25 schools were identified in Konoin Sub-County, Bomet County and fund-raising commenced towards meeting the costs of producing 2000 MCFp Reusable Sanitary Towels, and facilitating trainings for teachers and students and formation of Health Clubs in target schools. The project that was slated for 13th and 14th March, was hit by a double-blow; the COVID-19 related safety measures halted the venture, and the project's potential donor later withdrew support due unforeseen circumstances.



As a baseline survey had been done in the area, expectancy was high amongst the schools identified. Fortunately an old friend of MCFp, came through to enable trainings, formation of Health Clubs and the distribution of 500 MCFp Reusable Sanitary Towels in 7 schools. Though the 7 schools have a total population of approximately 4,200 students, approximately 1000 students

only participated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 1000 students, only 500 needy girls who had been identified in the 7 schools managed to get MCFp's Re-Usable Sanitary Towels. Photos above show some of the recipients of sanitary pads.

The pilot project, therefore, addressed reproductive health needs of vulnerable school going girls in Bomet County, not only through the provision of MCFp's Re-Usable Sanitary Towels, but also through Menstrual Hygiene Management & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights education, and the setting up of Health Clubs in 7 schools out of 25 identified schools. It is our hope that the exercise will continue in 2021 and beyond with in marginalised Counties.

DISTRIBUTION OF DISPOSABLE SANITARY PADS AT OUR COMMUNITY LIBRARY:



Photo 9: Sanitary Pads Distribution at the MCFp Centre

A collaborative free sanitary pads' distribution venture with Schools of Hope {SOH - that runs library and study group projects in the slums} was done to benefit a total of 32 girls from MCFp's School Sponsorship and Teenage Mothers' Programmes every month - from March to December; other girls from the slums also benefited from free sanitary pads' distribution.

LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS: Several life skill sessions were facilitated over the course of 2020 for children attending MCFp's Community Library. The sessions were conducted by Trainers from Challenge Aid, who are the sponsors of School of Hope {SOH} programme. Topics covered include Self-esteem, Hygiene, and Creating Goals. Apart from these life skills sessions, the children would also enjoy indoor games such as chess, besides taking part in music sessions in the afternoon.

6. Livelihood Support Programme - Tours

There was only 1 tour in 2020, and that was in January before the lockdown. NB; the tours provide a livelihood option for beneficiaries exiting our programmes. Thus, COVID-19 related safety directives also impacted negatively on the welfare of some beneficiaries.

7. Other Social and Welfare Issues / Interventions

BEREAVEMENT WITHIN THE MCFP FAMILY: An alumnus of MCFp's School Sponsorship Programme, who was a tutor at a vocational training centre in Segwa, Siaya County, passed away in March, 2020 from cancer; he had been taken to India for treatment in 2019. He is survived by

a wife, who is a teacher, and two children - a boy and a girl. Two members of MCFp staff attended his burial and were given an opportunity to eulogize him.

A beneficiary of MCFp's School Sponsorship Programme, who had been terminally ill, passed away in February. The adolescent boy had missed school for the last two years due to deteriorating health.

CASE FOLLOW UP AND OTHER INTERVENTIONS: A child neglect case involving one of our beneficiaries was reported to the Children's Office in Kisumu County. The case slowed down upon reaching the police intervention level because the alleged father is said to be a Police Officer; he had ignored several summons. Though the child's mother expressed her disinterest in following up on the case, we advised her that the action taken will be in the best interest of her child. The matter will be followed in 2021 after the lockdown that is in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic is lifted. Case follow ups amongst MCFp's School Sponsorship Programme beneficiaries established that:

- **54 children were malnourished** {interventions taken to mitigate the situation included provision of food baskets};
- **59 children were experiencing abuse** {appropriate interventions were taken depending on the severity and context of abuse, including parent-child mediation. NB domestic violence incidences spiked during the stay-at-home directive};
- **109 children were in need of medical intervention** were identified {the diseases presented ranged from malaria to dysentery}.

8. Gender Based Violence and Teen Pregnancies

We intervened in several SGBV cases affecting our beneficiaries; we provided the survivors with assistance in the reporting process, medical referrals and other requisite referrals. Given that non-reporting of SGBV is high in informal settlements, we could only empathize with the many girls who get caught up in incidences of sexual violence, but are unable to seek intervention. NB *violence against women and girls has been dubbed as the "shadow pandemic" during COVID-19.* We also got feedback from the community networks through which we recruit beneficiaries for the Teenage Mothers' Programme about a spike in the incidence of teen pregnancies. Almost all of the 47 Counties of Kenya have been hard hit by the teenage pregnancy crisis implying that the community's needs for our programme is bound to be high in 2021.

ASANTE SANA!!!