

## Daraja - Shared Services Platform



# Ruben Centre's holistic approach to community development in Nairobi's Mukuru Slums

### At a glance

In the heart of Nairobi's Mukuru slums, Ruben Centre stands as a beacon of hope, offering comprehensive support from “womb to tomb” for hundreds of thousands of residents. This multifaceted institution provides free education, essential healthcare, vocational training, and innovative community development programs. Despite challenges, Ruben Centre's impact is profound, setting a new standard for holistic, community-driven change in urban slums



### Ruben Centre: A Beacon of Hope in Nairobi's Mukuru Slums

In the southeastern part of Nairobi, where hundreds of thousands live in the densely packed Mukuru slums, an oasis of hope thrives. The Ruben Centre, under the guidance of director Frank O'Shea, has become an integral part of daily life for many, offering what O'Shea describes as “womb to tomb care” for the community.





What began as a modest primary school in 1986 has evolved into a comprehensive hub of education, healthcare, and community development. On any given Saturday morning, the centre buzzes with activity. *"It was actually calmer than most such days as some children had been ferried away to attend various competitions and forums in the city,"* O'Shea notes, highlighting the centre's engagement beyond its walls.

Education remains at the core of Ruben Centre's mission. Ruben Primary School provides free education to over 3,000 children, emphasizing not just academic subjects but also life skills and extracurricular activities. The centre's commitment to inclusivity is evident in its special needs program, which offers tailored support to children with physical and intellectual disabilities.

*"Our goal is to serve the wider Embakasi region,"* says O'Shea, referring to the expansive area of the city that starts just after South C and extends all the way to the border with the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. This ambitious vision is perhaps most visible in the Ruben Medical Clinic, a vital healthcare facility for the Mukuru community.

Bernard Ondieki, the centre's data and administration manager, shares impressive statistics: *"We attend to about 1,500 patients a month, who seek about 25,000 services within the same period."* The clinic offers a wide range of services, from general outpatient care to specialized maternal and child health programs. Ondieki proudly adds, *"We have recently installed a modern laboratory that will enhance access to globally competitive services in the slums."*

Ruben Centre's impact extends far beyond education and healthcare. The institution runs various empowerment programs, particularly targeting women and youth. These initiatives include microfinance projects, vocational training, and support groups, helping community members gain financial independence and valuable skills.

Environmental sustainability is another focus area for Ruben Centre. The centre promotes waste management and recycling projects, and has established urban farming initiatives – efforts that have garnered international recognition. *"We recently traveled to Berlin, Germany to receive an international award for our urban farming projects,"* O'Shea mentions with pride.

However, operating in such a challenging environment comes with significant obstacles. Funding remains a constant concern, with the centre relying heavily on donor support to sustain and expand its crucial services. *"This is an expensive affair,"* O'Shea acknowledges. *"We can't function without donor support, as government funding is limited to capitation to pupils, which is not enough."*



In addressing these challenges, Ruben Centre has formed a partnership with the Daraja Shared Services Platform by the Global Development Incubator. This collaboration represents a shared commitment to locally-led development efforts. *“They look for the best fits for us, and this is quite helpful,”* O’Shea explains. *“Additionally, GDI trains us regularly on how to build capacity, and we have recently made a request to them to help us recruit members of our trustee board.”*

Tania Ngima of the Livelihood Impact Fund emphasizes the importance of such partnerships in the NGO community. *“The importance of shared service platforms like Daraja, that provide essential technical and operational services in order to facilitate a shift in global funding towards local organizations, cannot be overemphasized,”* she notes.

Looking ahead, Ruben Centre aims to expand its reach even further. Plans include constructing additional classrooms, expanding healthcare facilities, and introducing new vocational training courses. The centre also seeks to strengthen its advocacy efforts, working with government agencies to address systemic issues affecting the Mukuru community.

As Ruben Centre continues its vital work, it’s not just changing individual lives – it’s rewriting the narrative of what’s possible in urban slums. The centre’s holistic approach to community development serves as a model that could potentially transform similar communities around the world.

For those inspired by Ruben Centre’s mission, there are various ways to support their cause. Whether through financial contributions, volunteer work, or spreading awareness about their impactful programs, every bit of support helps Ruben Centre continue its transformative work in the Mukuru slums.

In a world grappling with urban poverty, Ruben Centre stands as a testament to the power of compassion, dedication, and community-driven development. It’s more than just an NGO; it’s a lifeline, a school, a clinic, and a catalyst for change all rolled into one – offering hope and opportunity where it’s needed most.



*In case of any questions or feedback, please reach out to **Kim Matu - Associate Director, Global Development Incubator** - on [kim.matu@globaldevincubator.org](mailto:kim.matu@globaldevincubator.org) and we will get back to as soon as possible.*

*Thank you for your partnership and collaboration.*

**Sanlam Tower, 4th Floor Waiyaki Way, Nairobi, Kenya**  
[www.globaldevincubator.org](http://www.globaldevincubator.org)