

Revisiting Mafucula - Part 2

Finding friends after 25 years – 2025

- *If you haven't read the beginning of this community story, read **Mafucula Case Study – Part 1***

I have visited Mafucula Community a few times since leaving the country in 1998, and I found several developments and improvements, as well as some of the older projects and buildings still active. But my visit in October 2025 was extra-special because I found most of the people that I had worked alongside all those years ago.

Babe Frans and make Christina Masuku – came out of their church service to greet me. We had first found their grown-up son, Sambulo at the Masuku's shop, and he took us to where the Masukus were holding their weekly church service.



Sambulo is working as the Community Development Liaison Officer for the Mafucula area, with the Tinkhundla government department. His job is to inform the government of the issues facing the community and then to oversee any infrastructure projects that are undertaken by the government in the area. He proudly showed us the new concrete road being built between Mafucula and Mnyangombili – to adequately cater for the big cane trucks that now move the sugarcane out of the area to the sugar mill.



Sambulo also took us to see Justice and Margaret in their homestead. It was incredible to see them both – although Justice is not well, he came out to see us and still has his old smile. Their children are all grown up, and they, like me are now grandparents.



Next part of the visit involved driving over the hill to Mnyangombili to see the preschool that was built there. The area is now covered with cane fields and water points for the cane, so the valley looks different. The preschool is still standing – even with the original paintings that were done for the opening ceremony! It is currently being used as a storeroom for building materials, as the European Commission has provided funding for a farmers' cooperative in the area. A second building – a small shop – has also been built on the premises.



The sugarcane fields in Mnyangombili (above) and the preschool building (below)



On the way back to Mafucula, I asked Sambulo if he might know where Jane Mavundla (Mnyangombili preschool teacher) would be, so that I could see her too. He was not sure where her house was - but as we drove, he suddenly said “Here’s Jane!” She was sitting by the roadside waiting for a bus!



We could not contain our excitement at finding each other again – after so many years! Jane looks exactly the same and is as cheerful and as colourful as ever! She was waiting to catch the bus to go and buy bricks for an extension that she is building at her house.



The business centre at the entrance to Mafucula has been expanded – from one set of business units to two. Various businesses are occupying the business units and it seems to remain a key meeting point for community members.





The new business centre block under construction

Although there are challenges with the cane growing (many deductions from the local sugar company to cover water, transport, etc which some farmers did not quite understand), the Mafucula community members seem content with how they have grown things in the area over the years.

Driving out of the area, we stopped at the original maize grinding mill building - a small single room built with funding from the British High Commission in the 1980s. I heard the sound of a big machine running in the building and was delighted to see that the building has been extended and now houses a big electric grinding machine, much more efficient!



As we left Mafucula, I looked back and saw the signs for the cane development in the area, as well as the reinforced culvert at the river crossing. Realizing that I had arrived here as a naïve social work student back in 1986 with very little real idea of what I was going to do, I feel an immense gratitude to God for guiding me and to the people in Mafucula for accepting and welcoming me. Having worked with the ABCD (Asset-Based Citizen-led Development) approach since the early 1980s, I realize the absolute necessity and value in allowing people to find their own voice, realize their own strengths and assets, and to determine their own destinies. Mafucula remains forever my foundational learning ground and my deepest treasured community development memories.

