

Mkombozi

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Mkombozi mentors and youth unite in community work

On the 26th June, a full minibus from Mkombozi carried staff members, children, mentors, and 110 tree plants to Reginald Mengi Secondary School in Moshi town. The agenda of the day was outdoor environmental community work - an activity through which the youth of Mkombozi and their mentors can jointly build a voluntary and meaningful working commitment.

Recently, it had come to the attention of mentors and staff of Mkombozi that the fields surrounding Reginald Mengi Secondary School in central Moshi were lacking trees. They had the idea that each Reginald Mengi student could look after one tree during their three or four years tenure, ensuring that the environment surrounding the school would be transformed into a greener and better place. This was the basis for identifying Reginald Mengi Secondary as a place for community work that enabled mentors, mentees and members of the public to work together. The event was made possible, in part, by Upendo Garden and Kibo Environment Conservation Society (KECOSO) - two nurseries in Majengo that jointly donated 60 tree plants (in addition to the 50 tree plants donated by Mkombozi).

Mkombozi has been recruiting mentors (i.e. "Big Brothers" and "Big Sisters") since 2003. "At first mentors were only recruited for children at the centre, but nowadays even children in the community and the streets are connected to a mentor", tells Amani Lucas, Senior Community Engagement Officer. He says that the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Mkombozi are usually connected to the children who are in great need of an adult to offer them support through emotional difficulties and habits of truancy.

"To do this kind of community / planting work helps the children to cultivate a habit of working and living in a clean environment", says Salma Tatakahn, Senior Day Supervisor at the Mkombozi residential center. Salma, who joined the cleaning of the open field behind Reginald Mengi Secondary School, feels that the teachers and mentors must act like role models and participate in activities like this in order to show the children the importance of taking responsibility. "They need to see that this is just normal work that anybody does", she says. Even though activities like these are very rewarding for the children of Mkombozi, Salma says that some prefer not to attend. "They don't want to be seen as street children anymore, and sometimes participating in activities with Mkombozi in the community makes them feel a bit outside and different from other children." However, Salma says, bringing children from Mkombozi together with other students is still a must since it brings them close to the community.

Frate Justo, a Big Brother of Mkombozi, planted trees together with his mentee, Victor - a boy he has been mentoring for the past six months. "We see each other in the weekends, and we exchange thoughts about different things", says Frate. "He tells me about his problems and I listen." According to Frate, the importance of having a mentor lies in the fact that the children not only need trusting staff members, but also a non-staff member to whom they can freely express their thoughts about the issues facing them in the centre. Right behind Reginald Mengi Secondary School, in a newly dug hole filled with soil, there is now a small tree which was put in the ground by Victor and Frate.

After a full mornings work cutting grass and planting trees, the Reginald School Head Mistress expressed her warm approval for a job well done. In turn, as the fifteen children, eight mentors, and three staff members who participated in the cleaning and tree-planting activities prepared to leave for the day, they promised to weed and water the trees so they would grow tall and healthy. Overall, by means of a simple interaction with their mentors and the Moshi community, the children had taken another positive step toward building a strong voluntary spirit that will carry them into the future.



Mkombozi youth and mentor work together