

Mkombozi

Empower. Engage. Enable.



Raising awareness...

Mkombozi's drama troupe raises awareness on violence against children

The recently formed Mkombozi drama troupe is now on tour around Arusha and Moshi delivering a play on the theme of violence against children. Welcoming large crowds of people in each public area it visits, the troupe provides an opportunity for laughter, sadness, reflection and conclusion. Drama is a direct tool which delivers a message at the level of the heart.

Violence is not a natural nor necessary feature of children's lives, and we should not accept it as such. If we want to see change - in legislation, communities, families, services, institutions and organisations - we must first acknowledge the nature of the problem and its extent. One of the most important things we can do, as an organisation, is bring violence into the open - really start talking about it. **The silence must be broken.**

By raising awareness about violence against children, Mkombozi aims to improve the level of knowledge, reflection and understanding around the harmful effects of abuse, as well as to influence the cultural and social norms which justify it or place it under the disguise of discipline. Our assumption is that if people become more aware about the harmful effects of abuse, this can catalyse a long-term decrease in the prevalence of violence against children.

The play "Kosa la nani?" (whose fault?) takes us straight into the everyday life of a family living in a city suburb. We get to meet the adolescent daughter, Maridadi, who spends all of her time in the home helping her mother with housework and serving customers with locally made alcohol. The son, Kado, struggles to balance the demands from primary school with the many tasks facing him in the household. Both the children experience harsh treatment from their parents, and as time goes by, each one of them feel forced to look for a life away from their mother and father. This play portrays the harmful effects of violence against children and casts light on the environments in which it often takes place. It asks us the question: what went wrong in the lives of these children and the whole family, and how could it have been prevented? Who is responsible?

The primary aim of Mkombozi's drama performances is not necessarily to directly point out what is "right" or "wrong"; rather, the aim is to present a problematic situation which people can recognise from their own communities. By observing the story and the interactions which take place on stage, members of the audience can relate to it from their own point of view, opinion and experience rather than being presented with directions which they do not "own".

Drama allows the audience to think about their own solutions for the presenting problem - all of which is expressed and heard through interactive audience questioning by the actors throughout the play. Drama encourages participants and observers to speak without the inhibitions which formal meetings or other communication systems perpetuate (www.seka-educational-theatre.com).



The Mkombozi drama performances are a part of our 08/09 campaign "Linda watoto sasa!" which raises awareness about violence and the better protection of children.

Importantly, public drama is as much of a learning experience for Mkombozi as it is for the audience. Considering that "violence" in itself is a socially and culturally constructed concept which is not necessarily shared by all societies around the world, we seek to examine how people interpret and perpetuate actions which are harmful to children. Through observation during performances, we increase our knowledge about how the community relates to these matters. In addition, through a simple written exercise used during performances, the men, women and children in the audience are given the opportunity to reflect and express their answers to the following two questions:

1. What kind of things happen between children and adults, or between children and the community as a whole, that you don't like to see happening?
2. What kind of things (concerning children) would you like to see happening in families or in the community as a whole?

The following answers are a small sample of the exercises collected at drama performances so far:

What kind of things happen between children and adults, or between children and the community as a whole, that you don't like to see happening?

- I don't like to see that a child is caned - I don't like to see that a child is abused - I would not like to see that a child lacks three meals a day - I would not like to see that a child lacks care - I would not like to see that a child lacks primary education - For the teacher to punish a child instead of explaining to him how to get an education - For children to drop out of school - For girls to get married when they are still in school - Children leave school and are forced to work - When bad and dirty things are done to children - Abuse - To deny them education - Disease - To lack love - For children to lack closeness from the family and the community - To cane a child who has done nothing wrong - Think about if you come from drinking alcohol and you insult and do bad things. But when a child insults you cane him. Who canes you? - Things which I don't like is for children to be sent to work, and to not get time to study, but this is the outcome of life in poverty in which many families live, especially in the village. Parents don't have time to give children time to study, children work with cultivation and taking care of the livestock.

What kind of things, concerning children, would you like to see happening in families or in the community as a whole?

- The child is given good food - The child is given a good place to sleep - Care - The child should get three meals a day - Better education for the child - The family should be protectors of rights of children - Respect the rights of children - Education - Play - For all street children to be brought to school - A good life - Closeness in between family and children - Children should stop smoking marijuana and cigarettes - Children should stop selling their bodies - Things I would like to see happening is to get good food, better education, health care - First of all we should stop stigmatising children because we have given birth to them ourselves - Even if our needs are heavy, let us not abuse them - Food and clothing - We like to see children who are walking around the streets being brought to school



Through drama, Mkombozi seeks to examine how and why harm against children is perpetuated...

