

# Mkombozi

Empower. Engage. Enable.



## A learning meeting...

### Engaging the community in providing a safe place for children

Recently, Mkombozi's Community Engagement group held a learning meeting in Arusha, inviting stakeholders from government, civil society, community and youth to reflect on how to engage the community to protect children and provide them with a safe place. The meeting was an opportunity to exchange ideas, challenge assumptions and improve practice in child protection. The proceedings had three dimensions: (1) a deeper understanding of child protection as a way of setting the scene for the meeting; (2) looking at the roles of various actors in child protection through sharing by guest speakers; and lastly, (3) reflection on how to strengthen partnerships geared towards a common action plan in engaging communities more deeply in child protection issues.

There is plenty of hope for the children in Tanzania. In the introductory session of the meeting, three out of 31 participants shared similar stories of how they themselves have extended safe and protective arms to abandoned children, and managed to care for them like their own. In fact, as a result of this care, today, one of these children has been educated to be a doctor, another to be a teacher, and one is in university. Participants also shared stories of the children they remember as special to them. Meeting facilitators emphasised the fact that 50% of Tanzania's population is currently comprised of children / youth; and as such, if one adult cared for just one child, then the children of the country would flourish and blossom.

Mr. Evance Balama, the DC of Arusha, formally opened the learning meeting and moved the participants with an inspiring speech. The DC mentioned that he personally visits some of the critical areas in Arusha to assess the situation and has witnessed children and young people living in very desolate conditions. The DC invited all actors - government, civil society and community - to join hands in combating the situation.

One of the sessions enabled participants to reflect on how different generations perceived childhood. Some of the conclusions were that the older generation valued boys more than girls - they were seen as leaders and providers of labour force. Girls, on the other hand, were seen as part of the "property" - they worked at home and bore children. In general, children were viewed as belonging to the community. Looking back at their own childhood, participants saw that boys were listened to, had educational opportunities and were prepared to be good citizens. They also saw that girls rarely received higher education, and were simply prepared to be "good wives". Notably, some parents did value both boys and girls as equal.

With respect to what it means to be a child today, the participants said that children do not "belong" to the community any longer. They are more protected, more independent and more confident - they know about rights and equality. Also, children nowadays are more exposed to hazardous behaviours.



**There is hope for Tanzania's children.** Three out of 31 meeting participants shared stories of how they themselves have extended care to abandoned children. Today, these children are flourishing...

The participants unanimously agreed that we need to protect children from physical abuse, sexual abuse, hazardous traditions, child labour, early marriages, negative effects of technology, and dangerous physical environments. These things were considered unjust since they rob children of their dignity.

The following questions were raised during the meeting: What is child protection? What are child rights? Which child needs protection? What traditions are appropriate for the child? What are different strategies to enforce parents and community to protect children? What should the community do to rescue children? What are the alternative ways that can be used to discipline a child other than corporal punishment? Who is responsible for protecting children?

There were good contributions from guest speakers who raised discussions among the participants. Mr. David Ndauka, Community Development Officer from Arusha Municipality, explained the plans and efforts of the Arusha City Council this past year to help children and youth. Magdalene Aquiline from Women's Legal Aid Centre gave a solid background of legal implications around child protection. Mr. Paul M. Ntobi, Chief of Community Policing, Tanzania Police force and Ms. Elice Mapunda, Police Training College, Dar es Salaam presented the role of the police and community in protecting citizens, particularly children. Mr. Ntobi also explained the different plans the police department has to bring the police and people together to reduce crime and support vulnerable people.

The last and most critical session of the meeting was centered on strengthening partnerships that enable communities to protect children. The participants grouped according to their specific roles and departments (NGOs, Police, Community Development, Social Welfare and Education, Mkombozi stakeholders and community members) and discussed some action plans, including:

- To provide human rights education to the community in Unga limited, Pasua and Terent and establish child protection committees (Community Development, Social Welfare and Education).
- To build capacity and bring awareness in the northern zone with support of Social Welfare and local government, and to identify and solve problems in the neighbourhood (police force).
- To bring awareness of child protection in northern region to NGOs and to disseminate literature produced by community police.
- To educate the community about children's rights in Kombo, Rau and Ngarenaro and to partner with the police force to teach youth about safety and community policing (Mkombozi stakeholders).

### **Quotes / reflections about child protection offered by meeting participants as a "closing gift":**

- Abolish corporal punishment
- Child protection catalyst
- Let's educate the community about child protection
- You are an ambassador
- Cooperation and love
- Child first
- Help children
- Convincing and legal
- Prioritise children
- More security for children
- Let's take responsibility to protect children
- We will reach wider community regardless the distance
- We are committed to work for the community
- Promote triple E (Engage, Educate, Enable)



Participants discussed action plans for partnerships that enable communities to protect children...



Mr. Balama, the DC of Arusha, invited all sectors of society to work together for child protection...

