

# Mkombozi

Empower. Engage. Enable.



## MKOMBOZI @ WORK

### Up close and personal...

#### Interview with Fred Mbise, Street Educator

PERIODICALLY, WE USE "MKOMBOZI @ WORK" TO GIVE YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW THE ORGANISATION THROUGH THE EYES, HEARTS AND HANDS OF KEY STAFF MEMBERS. IN THIS ISSUE, WE INTERVIEW FRED MBISE, MKOMBOZI STREET EDUCATOR. IN THIS ROLE, FRED: 1. PERFORMS "STREET WORK" (I.E. MEETING CHILDREN ON THE STREETS AND BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM); 2. DELIVERS NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (NFE) THROUGH MOBILE SCHOOL METHODOLOGY (I.E. USING THE MOBILE SCHOOL TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN FUN AND INTERACTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES); 3. VISITS POLICE STATIONS, REMAND HOMES AND PRISONS (FOR JUVENILE JUSTICES ISSUES); 4. REFERS CHILDREN TO OTHER COMMUNITY / SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS.

#### **How long have you been working with Mkombozi? Do you remember why you first wanted to work with the organisation?**

I have been working with Mkombozi for more than a year. Before I joined Mkombozi, I was working as a teacher. I have always held a passion for work with children, especially vulnerable ones - I believe that vulnerable children deserve a decent life, opportunities to develop themselves. In 2008, I worked as a research assistant at Mkombozi where I interviewed children at Mkombozi centre and those who live on the streets in Arusha. During this work, I realized that I could be a team player in Mkombozi's team of staff to help street-involved children.

#### **What are the various roles you play in your capacity as Street Educator?**

As Street Educator my roles include delivering NFE to children on the street through Mobile School methodology, spending quality time with the children on the street (daytime and nighttime), which includes listening to the children and providing psychosocial support. I also visit the Central Police Station in Arusha town, Remand Home and Kisongo Prison for juvenile justice related issues.

#### **What are the challenges in your "street work" with youth on the streets?**

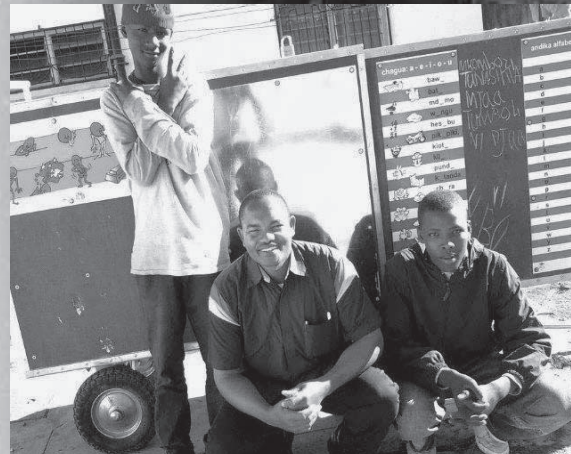
The challenges in my work are varied, but I see them as learning opportunities. Challenges come from the family, community members and the children themselves. Specifically, in the community, people who have negative mindset about street-involved children pose a difficulty. Some believe those children are "bad" by nature and that we just can't do anything to help/change them. Statements like "Are you doing the work of changing a forest francolin into a hen?" implying that you can't do anything to help the street-involved children. So my other duty is to talk to community members, police officers and any other people I meet on the street on issues related to their attitudes towards street-involved children. With respect to the children themselves, they present different challenges for me - firstly about their expectations of Mkombozi. Some believe Mkombozi has to provide everything for them and so they don't pay much attention to what we try to advise them or the work and efforts they themselves need to make.

#### **Why is the Mobile School an important initiative for Mkombozi?**

The Mobile School's objective to raise child self-esteem complements Mkombozi's work in building children's resilience. We therefore engage children in learning activities in supportive relationships and a collaborative environment that creates love and trust, provides role models, offers encouragement and reassurance. All of this helps to foster a child's positive self-view and confidence in his/her strengths and abilities. The Mobile School itself facilitates our outreach work with the community as well. Since it is visible in the community, the community members find it easier to come by and see what's going on and so we get time to talk with them about child rights and protection. Some of them take time to stay with us, participate in the activities to the end of the session.



Fred Mbise, Mkombozi Street Educator



Fred and youth, in front of the Mobile School

**Describe a recent event / youth that you encountered during a Mobile School outing that you felt was very positive / successful.**

Due to the vulnerable and desperate conditions of street-involved children, you would rarely hear people talking positively about them let alone trusting them. But one Friday after Mobile School, we issued a "sick sheet" to one boy who was feeling ill and he headed to hospital. After about two hours this boy came to the office and said he had found a wallet (with cash and credit cards inside) which he handed to the secretary. The wallet's owner eventually came by, and he gave 30,000/= Tsh to this boy as a gift. He was surprised to learn that the boy lived on the street.

**In your experience, why do children in Tanzania find themselves living or working on the streets of Arusha and Moshi?**

Each child we see on the street is very unique and comes there for different reasons. The common ones that most children say include broken homes/marriages (father and mother separating, divorcing and/or remarried so the child living with a step mother of father), abuse, neglect and poverty. Another reason is freedom, there are children who upon finding that the home is too strict they decide to take to the streets where they hope to manage their own lives and exercise freedom.

**In your experience, what are the primary juvenile justice issues in Tanzania?**

In general, any matters related to the handling of children in conflict with the law are of primary concern - especially the wellbeing of children, including child abuse, health and youth crime. One wonders how children survive on the street where there maybe so much violence and also a great risk of being slandered.

Another important issue is the minimum age of criminal responsibility. In this regard, Section 15 of the Penal Code of Tanzania provides as follows: "a person

under the age of seven years is not criminally responsible for any act or omission." However this minimum age of criminal responsibility has been raised to 10 years of age by the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act of Tanzania (1998). Then, if a child is arrested and held in detention, does the child stay together with adults? When

**"The courts lack technical, material and financial resources, so it can be difficult for juvenile criminal justice to be correctly implemented and practically effective..."**

taken to court, is there a special juvenile court where the case will be heard in a conducive environment that ensures justice for the child?

We now have the new Child Law Act in Tanzania but the legal framework governing juvenile justice is not correctly and effectively implemented. Children, and especially street-involved children, suffer from police brutality and arbitrary arrest. In the court, I still see a major shortage of technical and material resources as well as lack of financial resources so it can be a difficult thing for juvenile criminal system to be practically effective.

However, in my naturally optimistic perspective, I can say that I see changes in the attitudes of many police officers at the police station. I am glad to see that when children are arrested, they enjoy basic procedural safeguards such as the presumption of innocence (though its only to some extent). This could be a result of the many seminars conducted by Mkombozi to police officers as well as our close co-operation with the Community Police. Last year for instance, three police officers gave out their mobile phone numbers to the children after they facilitated training on safety to street-involved children, organized by Mkombozi. Also, I just learnt from the Social Worker in charge of the remand home here in Arusha that now social workers are in a position to suggest what punishment a child who has committed a crime should get after hearing as well as providing a written report in respect of the child. This is an achievement to our work in ensuring juvenile justice especially to the street involved children!

**To which Mkombozi project / program would you add resources?**

Well, that is definitely the Community Engagement Program. The reason is simply that children come from the community. If communities are educated and empowered to protect children, then they will be determined to take the necessary steps required to make communities a better place where children's rights are prioritized and realized. Although we have assumption that street involved children are the only ones who take to the streets due to abuse, the fact is that there are so many children who are abused in their communities. So, communities should be our prime target.

**Fred, in your years with Mkombozi, what was your "best day" or your fondest memory?**

On 12th April, 2011, we celebrated the International Day of the Street Child, and the Arusha District Commissioner graced the event (held at the Sheikh Amri Abeid Memorial Stadium in Arusha) as the Guest of Honour. What made my day was the moving speech the Guest of Honour delivered...

He said that Mkombozi has "shown the way" and that now government and Local Government (especially Arusha Municipal Council), would now take the necessary measures to see that the street-involved children are given opportunities for development. Youth who need to be taken back to school and vocational training centres will be given opportunities to do so, and youth who wish to start up small scale businesses will also receive support from the government.

In his speech, you could surely see that the Arusha District Commissioner spoke with determination both as a parent and duty bearer. This was a milestone of achievement for Mkombozi's work!