

## Demonstrating the potential of MEMKWA to respond to the learning needs of street children

### (i) Introduction

**Mpango kwa Elimu Maalum kwa Watoto waliokosa (MEMKWA) is "a type of educational activity that is organised around the learning needs of specific target groups and which takes place outside the formal school system. It aims at enabling individuals or communities to solve their own problems and is characterised by the objective, the flexibility in terms of time, location and in adapting the learning contents to each specific group"<sup>1</sup>.**

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), MEMKWA's primary aim is to increase access to basic education for out-of-school children and to ensure that children, youth, and illiterate adults have access to high-quality learning opportunities. Specific MEMKWA goals are to increase the national literacy level by 20% and to decrease the backlog of out-of-school children<sup>2</sup>, and to do so using adult education learning methodologies that address (what are perceived to be) the specific learning needs of its 3 target groups:

① **Out-of-school children between the ages of 11 and 13:** This group is "mainstreamed" into the formal school system upon completion of a condensed 2 year MEMKWA course which prepares them for the Standard IV examination.

② **Out-of-school children and youth between the ages of 14 and 18:** This group participates in a 3 year MEMKWA course designed to prepare them for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and to acquire skills for self-employment.

③ **Illiterate adults:** This group is provided with training for literacy, communication, essential life skills, as well as livelihood and community development.

Mkombozi is one of the first non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be registered as a MEMKWA provider. The organisation is using this opportunity to demonstrate MEMKWA's potential to do more than merely offer access to education to out-of-school children. Mkombozi is extending and applying MOEC MEMKWA with the primary objective to build students who are articulate, self-aware, competent decision-makers, able to live and work with others. The purpose of this paper is to document the challenges that Mkombozi has faced in applying the MOEC MEMKWA programme and the adaptations that it has applied in order to practise MEMKWA that is relevant and appropriate to the vulnerable children with whom Mkombozi works.

This position paper is the first in a series that will:

(a) document Mkombozi's experience using MEMKWA to deliver education to street children and youth;

(b) advocate for relationship-oriented and transformative forms of education that move beyond the question of basic access. The issues discussed and the recommendations provided are intended to facilitate a more extensive debate amongst policy makers, civil society and education actors on how to most effectively provide quality basic education to all vulnerable out-of-school children, including street children.

1. Working Definitions of Key Terms-strategy paper AE-NFE.

2. Forward of Adult / Non-Formal Education Implementation Plan by Joseph J. Mungai, Minister for Education and Culture.



## (ii) Mkombozi MEMKWA versus MOEC MEMKWA

### A) Street children are vulnerable, out-of-school children:

Mkombozi works with children who have lived under difficult circumstances and have been traumatised by their experiences of the world. Their childhood experiences, including physical and sexual abuse, neglect and/or bereavement, manifest in reduced concentration, poor conflict management skills, anger, frustration, bullying, low self-esteem, a tendency toward social isolation, and inability to build constructive peer relationships. Moreover, these children are unable to trust adults or themselves, and they are unable to identify or nurture their own interests, talents and potential. In fact, many of these children choose to use drugs to dull the pain and difficulties of their daily lives, and others have mental health problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder, depression and self-harm. In short, the children with whom Mkombozi works are vulnerable, out-of-school children with special emotional and behavioural needs.

### B) Mkombozi's MEMKWA "student profile":

Whereas MOEC MEMKWA prioritises complementary basic education to increase primary school enrolment, Mkombozi MEMKWA emphasises child-centred and active learning approaches to provide education that fosters self-reliance in vulnerable, out-of-school children with special needs. Specifically, Mkombozi's MEMKWA programme primarily seeks to provide vulnerable children with a foundation to learn how to live with others, to develop ethical behaviour, and to build the skills, knowledge and attitudes characteristic of enquiring learners.

#### ~~ Mkombozi's vision of the MEMKWA graduate ~~

We are helping children to become articulate, self-aware, effective decision-makers who are able to live and work with others. We encourage them to value and appreciate beauty (art, music, the environment), to build their self-esteem and confidence, to inculcate a value and desire for self-development, and to aspire to something better in life. We provide opportunities for them to become social activists, to interact with people from different backgrounds, to volunteer and to challenge the status quo in a society that tends not to value young people. We want them to behave responsibly, honestly, openly and creatively.

In fact, Mkombozi has identified a particular set of skills, attitudes and behaviours considered to be essential assets for youth who will become self-reliant, productive members of society -- the Mkombozi MEMKWA "Student Profile". This student profile is key to the MEMKWA programme at Mkombozi, because it represents the objectives, it drives the curriculum, and it determines the process of assessment which "closes the circle" of our work with students. According to the profile, Mkombozi's MEMKWA students are:

① **Inquirers:** They investigate a problem in depth, because their natural curiosity has been nurtured. They have skills necessary to conduct purposeful, constructive research. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.

① **Thinkers:** They exercise initiative in thinking critically and creatively to make sound decisions and to solve complex problems.

① **Communicators:** They receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of mathematical symbols. They can listen, give and receive feedback, offer opinions and build on the contributions of others. They are able to confer with others and reach a compromise. They are able to discuss, share their points of view, build new meaning and develop a plan for action.

① **Risk-takers:** They approach unfamiliar situations without anxiety and have the confidence and independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are courageous in defending that in which they believe.

① **Knowledgeable:** They have spent time exploring themes which have global relevance and have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge. They can take more than one idea or subject and interlink it with others harmoniously. They also have knowledge of themselves - of their history, identity, desires and behaviour patterns. They can set and work towards their personal targets for change.

① **Principled:** They have integrity, honesty, a sense of fairness / justice and a sound grasp of moral reasoning.

① **Caring:** They show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a sense of personal commitment to action and service.

① **Open-minded:** They respect the views, values and traditions of other individuals and cultures and are accustomed to seeking and considering a variety of perspectives. They have confidence in the loyalty, strength and veracity of other people.

① **Well-balanced:** They understand the importance of physical and mental balance and personal well-being.

① **Reflective:** They can look within to begin a process of personal change. They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and analyse their personal strengths and weaknesses constructively.

① **Collaborators:** They can work with others towards a common goal. They can identify their own and others' talents and build on them. They can cooperate to make change and to better their own and others' lives.

### C) Mkombozi's MEMKWA program:

By identifying the characteristics and behaviours to be built in their students, Mkombozi's MEMKWA programme can selectively employ the teaching methodologies and approaches that will facilitate such skill development most effectively. In fact, Mkombozi uses a range of activities outside of the classroom to develop young people according to the student profile, including: extra-curricular clubs; morning assembly led by the children and educators; and, study tours to local businesses, community groups and places of interest. Notably, the children have even formed their own Drama Troupe which hosts a monthly community event of music, dance, drama, acrobatics and rap. The children have also formed music groups that perform and record their own music, and they have established art groups that paint and sell their work in local hotels.

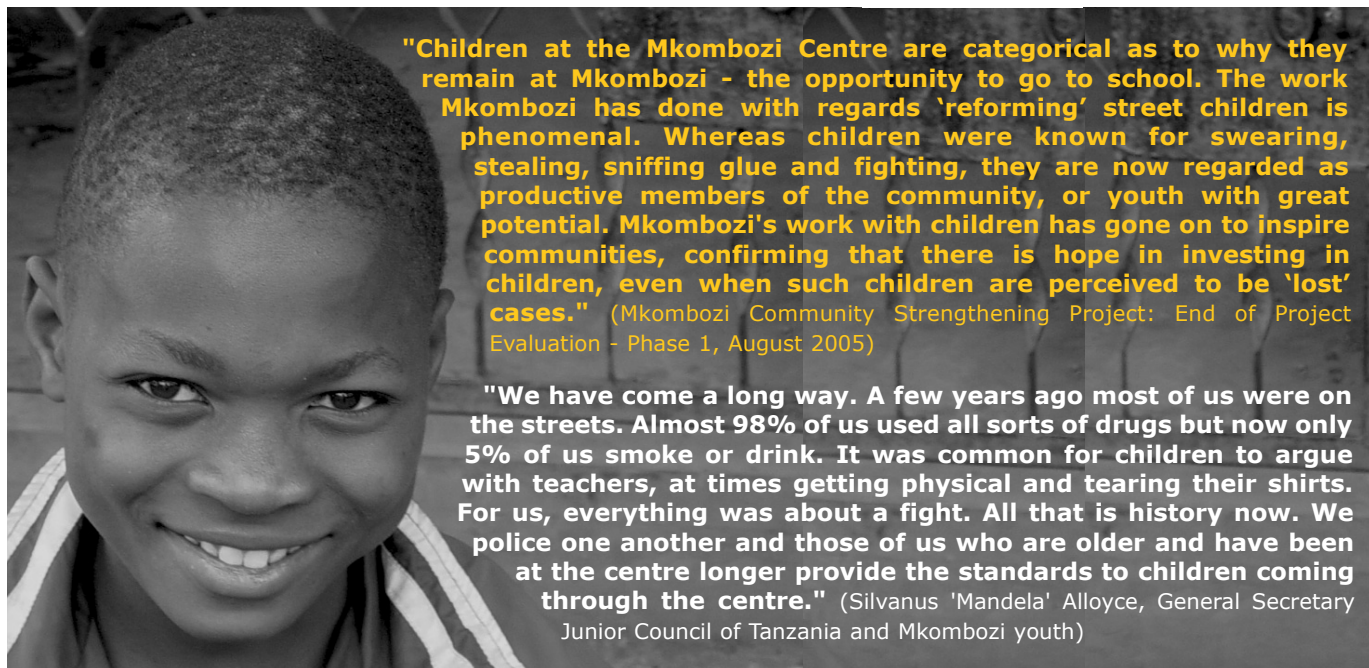
Inside the classroom, Mkombozi educators use games, story-telling and "classroom contracts" (i.e. the children decide upon expected behaviour and consequences for poor behaviour), they coach the children individually, and they facilitate peer support when appropriate. Educators work directly with the students to clearly identify the problem(s) they want to solve - in effect, cooperation of children and staff greatly enhances interaction, communication and dialogue.

Notably, Mkombozi MEMKWA requires more than formal education. For instance, attempting to teach self-reliance to youth without practical assistance in finding vocational training and employment would be significantly difficult. For this reason, Mkombozi also runs an apprenticeship program with local companies; apprenticeships are offered to Mkombozi's older youth as a means to build their vocational information technology skills through training as computer hardware technicians.

Practically speaking, Mkombozi's experience to date has shown that effective MEMKWA programming employs topic-based (rather than subject-based) learning, differentiation with the classroom, individualised learning goals for each child, and the direct involvement of students in the community<sup>3</sup>.

### D) The key to Mkombozi's MEMKWA success:

The District Education Office staff in Kilimanjaro frequently visit the Mkombozi MEMKWA programme. They comment that Mkombozi educators are the key attachments in the children's life and that our programme is about more than schooling children. Mkombozi's MEMKWA programme is indeed grounded upon the quality of relationship between the educator and child; from this foundation Mkombozi works toward transforming the child's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Without a positive and mutually respectful relationship, educators cannot work effectively with the students. By acknowledging and praising even the smallest changes taking place in the students, the Mkombozi MEMKWA programme contributes to transformation taking place in these young people's development.



### E) The challenges of MOEC MEMKWA:

By striving to achieve universal primary education through the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP), the Ministry of Education emphasises "inclusive education" and every child's right to basic education. Although the focus on increasing children's access to education is important, it has unfortunately resulted in a parallel neglect of issues around the **quality of education**. For many education actors on the ground (teachers, district officers, NGOs) there is an assumption that inclusive education means standardised education; that is, a "one-size-fits-all" approach. In practise, there is little recognition that different children have different educational needs and that an inclusive system must respond to these needs. In order for MOEC MEMKWA to "adapt the needs of the content to the specific group" as it purportedly intends, it must move beyond the issue of access and consider the opportunity for MEMKWA to pilot a more relationship-oriented and transformative education that can be scaled up through the primary school system.

<sup>3</sup>. Mkombozi's MEMKWA programme has a number of key approaches that underpin the delivery of this form of education. These will be detailed in the second of this series of position papers.

Although MOEC MEMKWA aims to cater to the needs of vulnerable out-of-school children, it is impossible to develop a relevant methodology in the absence of a clear understanding of what makes certain children vulnerable and how it manifests in their behaviour. Catering to children's needs with a broad brush and assuming that all out-of-school children have the same learning needs has meant that the formal teaching resources and methodology developed by MOEC MEMKWA is irrelevant to the needs of certain groups of children. For instance, during trainings of MEMKWA facilitators held by MOEC in Moshi Urban (2004), the focus was on the logistics and content involved, and not on the needs of out-of-school children or how to deliver an "adult learning methodology". Although there was an emphasis on not using corporal punishment, skill development of the educators did not go beyond asking them to deliver a book-based curricula that focussed on the fact that children would eventually be mainstreamed into formal schools and thus needed to be capacitated to cope in that environment.

The fact is, despite MOEC MEMKWA's aims to enable "individuals and communities to solve their own problems", it is currently being used to speed out-of-school children through the formal school system. MEMKWA centres are becoming alternate locales for primary education, rather than an alternative form of education. For example, there is no teacher at the Mandela MEMKWA centre in Pasua, Kilimanjaro, and so the primary school has recently decided to integrate MEMKWA children with others in the formal school system. At the Erelai MEMKWA Centre in Hai district, there is only one teacher for numerous students enrolled at many different levels, and many students have dropped out as a result. Overall, although MOEC MEMKWA policy documents speak of "enabling the learner to take charge of their learning", in practice, it is simply being used as a tool to prepare children to sit Standard IV and VII examinations and to achieve certification.

### (iii) Key recommendations

#### ④ Clarity

To date, there is little clarity at a community level about the core objectives of MEMKWA. Is it a pioneering opportunity for education actors to develop high quality educational provision for out-of-school children and youth and thus to build their ability to become productive members of society? Or, is it a mechanism to fast-track out-of-school children through the system and deal with a backlog? It cannot be assumed that the former objective will necessarily be achieved simply by entering children into the current primary school system.

#### ④ Relevance

Within Tanzania there are millions of vulnerable children who have special educational needs. Entering them into the current primary system or a MEMKWA programme that replicates the primary system is not an adequate response to capture these children's potential. MEMKWA provides a significant opportunity for education actors to pilot a form of education that offers a strong foundation for young people.

#### ④ Flexibility

The MEMKWA programme offered by Mkombozi is a necessary foundation for any young person. It can be delivered to an older youth who has missed out on these vital building blocks. Likewise, the approach can be delivered to children as young as 3 years since it is based on the sound principles of early childhood development. By focussing on a child's individual needs, the programme can be used for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as those who are capable of being academically challenged.

#### ④ Resources

Mkombozi strongly recommends that the potential of MEMKWA to offer a high quality alternative form of education to vulnerable children be exploited. We recommend that MEMKWA centres be properly resourced, that educators be adequately trained to deliver MEMKWA in its totality, and that learning from the MEMKWA experience ultimately be scaled up throughout the primary school system.

### (iv) Conclusion

Mkombozi MEMKWA uses child-centred and active learning approaches to provide education that fosters self-reliance. MOEC MEMKWA uses complementary basic education to increase primary school enrolment. These two visions are fundamentally different and have implications for education in Tanzania, and for children in Mkombozi's care. Mkombozi's experience working with street children shows that MOEC MEMKWA does not provide appropriate education for vulnerable out-of-school children - particularly those with special needs - and that there are many gaps that need to be addressed if MEMKWA provision will serve its purpose. In fact, there is an urgent need to rethink how MEMKWA and primary education is being delivered in Tanzania - 50% of the country is comprised of children under the age of 15, and Mkombozi's research shows that 33-88% of children are currently at risk of truancy or dropping out of school.

Education that engages children, builds a strong foundation for their lives, and develops them as ethical, knowledgeable, well-balanced and open-minded young people must become a national priority. Continued replication of the current primary school system through MOEC MEMKWA centres ensures that children and youth will be denied a significant opportunity to receive education that is high quality, relevant, appropriate and holistic.

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