

Making MKUKUTA work for Tanzania's vulnerable children

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In 2005, Tanzania approved the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), better known by its Kiswahili acronym: MKUKUTA (Mkakati wa Kukuza uchumi na Kupunguza Umaskini). MKUKUTA is a national strategy to promote economic growth and reduce poverty that is built around 3 primary "clusters" of desired outcomes; namely: growth and the reduction of income poverty; improved quality of life and social well-being; good governance and accountability. The adoption of MKUKUTA is a pivotal moment in Tanzania's development process - it is the first time national policy explicitly works towards the strengthening of social safety nets for "vulnerable groups" such as street children and youth.

On the basis of extensive research and experience with street children, Mkombozi knows that poverty is not simply a lack of income - it is the experience of multiple forms of vulnerability, including familial conflict, domestic violence, family breakdown, social exclusion and income poverty that ultimately push children out of their homes in search of "a better life". As such, street children and socially excluded youth are a visible manifestation of poverty that provides a clear indication of how well existing social services are addressing child and familial vulnerability.

This means MKUKUTA can only achieve its stated goals and objectives by: (1) challenging the prejudice directed at street children and youth; (2) demanding that policy makers, civil society organisations and public servants address the complex issues that drive children and youth to urban centres; and (3) moving beyond the provision of "basic needs" to full support of children's rights to protection and development. In particular, the following MKUKUTA strategies have the potential to directly address child vulnerability, but in each case certain issues must be resolved in order for the principle to be realised in practice:

- **MKUKUTA is based on the premise that poverty will only be reduced once good governance and accountability prevails in Tanzania.** Importantly however, there is a real risk to the successful implementation of MKUKUTA since, at a local government level, many actors do not know about the policy and do not integrate it into their planning and implementation. There is a pressing need to inform police, council members and civil society organisations that MKUKUTA is a *national* policy and to hold them accountable for the integration of its goals, targets and strategies into their local level decisions.

- **MKUKUTA sets as an operational target to "ensure timely and appropriate justice for all especially the poor and vulnerable groups."** However, police training, legal reform, awareness raising and advocacy are urgently required to ensure dignity and respect between children and law enforcers. In particular, a significant attitudinal change amongst local government and public servants is required - until these actors see themselves as accountable both to the law and to citizens (irrespective of citizens' influence, wealth, gender or age), profound violations of human rights will continue to occur.

- **MKUKUTA's goal is to "reduce political and social exclusion and intolerance".** Unfortunately, the success of the local government reform process and the implementation of MKUKUTA is currently at risk because the increased authority that comes with locally managed budgets is not currently being matched by a concomitant increase in the civil servant skill base. The police "round-ups" of street children authorised by the Arusha Council provide a clear example of the serious potential for the violation of human rights by local authorities. Such violation will undoubtedly continue until Council members are conversant in the law and actively held accountable for implementing government policies and national and international laws. Currently it is not clear what strategy is in place to address this skill deficit at a local level.

- **MKUKUTA aims to "ensure sound economic management", one target being reduced unemployment.** In fact, there is a predominance of young people on the streets who are on the brink of adulthood, and yet ill-equipped and unable to access employment opportunities. Mkombozi recommends development of employment opportunities for youth, women and people with disabilities, as well as improvement of labour quality through apprenticeship and entrepreneurship programs for youth.

- **MKUKUTA strives towards "adequate social protection and rights of the vulnerable and needy groups with basic needs and services".** In order for this objective to be realised, work must be undertaken with the children themselves to find better solutions for helping children affected by poverty, conflict and HIV/AIDS. Specifically, there is a pressing need to explore potential community and family-based social protection measures for vulnerable children given that, in Tanzania, there has and continues to be a reliance on institutional care for street children and orphans in residential centres.

- **With specific focus on reducing child labour, MKUKUTA intends to uphold children's rights.** Problematically, child abuse is normalised in Tanzanian society, and this is demonstrated by MKUKUTA's quiescence on the issue of violence towards children. The emphasis placed on child labour as the primary violation of children's rights has resulted in neglect of wider issues of child protection, particularly the physical, verbal and sexual abuse that pushes children to the streets and that is a fact of street life.



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