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Mkombozi's latest campaign positions education as a key to individual and national development

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It is a troubling trend. Just 15% of Tanzania's population receive post-primary education¹ and less than 1% obtains a university degree.² In fact, Tanzanian upper secondary school enrolment (6%) lags significantly behind that of other sub-Saharan African nations (27% average).³ Not surprisingly then, Tanzania's vulnerable youth are even less likely to receive post-primary education; for instance, in the Kilimanjaro Region, youth who are financially ineligible to attend and attain higher education are "forced to eke out a living on plots less than one acre."⁴ Given the choice between peasant farming and the "promise land" of the streets, many children and young people turn to the streets.⁵ As such, the cycle of poverty and vulnerability that churns in Tanzania will continue through the generations unless there is a proactive break in each family's cycle. Education can be such a break.

In its work to support Tanzania's most vulnerable children since 1997, the Mkombozi Centre for Street Children has enabled primary and secondary education for the children in their care. Today, many of Mkombozi's former street children are growing into adulthood, and they continue to mature and succeed beyond the expectations of many. Unfortunately, limited funds restrict Mkombozi from offering secondary education to youth beyond Form IV. The fact is, except for the kindness of individual donors sponsoring select children, tertiary school fees are entirely prohibitive. This means that most students in Mkombozi's care, even when thriving in a school setting, are unable to access secondary (Forms V and VI) and tertiary (college and university) education.

To address this urgent situation and, in doing so, to contribute to Tanzania's overall development, Mkombozi has launched an Education Endowment Campaign⁶ designed to support its young adults to continue their education. Specifically, Mkombozi's objective is to raise Tsh 100 million. Funds raised for the campaign will be directly invested in an "endowment account" which provides sustainable accrued interest for the school fees of all Mkombozi's youth who are eligible to further their studies. Mkombozi's goal is to create support structures that enable young people to lead independent and productive lives.

Though there are few documented studies on the outcomes of Tanzanians who have accessed the highest levels of education, the studies that do exist confirm that the pay scale of those who successfully complete secondary schooling (i.e. Forms V and VI) is significantly higher than the pay scale of Tanzanians who do not complete secondary and tertiary education.⁷ Even so, the studies also show that the rate of return on a college education in the form of salary in Tanzania is still low when compared to other like-sized countries.⁸ This would indicate that the entire country (both educated and non-educated) is still suffering from slow development and that the national economic strategy for development remains fixed to agricultural export.

In the face of such statistics, and based on years of research and experience in Tanzania's most vulnerable, rural communities, Mkombozi knows that education alone cannot definitively alleviate the risks of an impoverished family, but it is a crucial beginning. Given that 50% of the Tanzanian population are children and youth, it is imperative that national resources are equitably shared to respond to their needs. Mkombozi's own Participatory Action Research shows that Tanzania's children and youth need social services and that key areas to invest capacity include high-quality education (all levels), vocational training and employment opportunities.⁹

Mkombozi invites partners and friends to contribute to the Education Endowment Campaign to help break cycles of poverty and vulnerability. By improving access to higher education, the Education Endowment Campaign can help to reduce the generational rise in Tanzania's vulnerable and street child populations and it will improve the lives of Mkombozi's current youth, including the families that they will eventually form.

References

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8. Ibid.
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