



## Characteristics of street children and youth:

This census gives us a snapshot of the lives and aspirations of street children and youth in northern Tanzania. The emerging picture contradicts prevailing attitudes that stigmatise these children as deviants, criminals and as socially aberrant. In fact, across Arusha and Moshi towns:

- 36% of CYP reported that they spend their time working, 77% reporting that they do so for more than 12 hours a day.
- 24% report that they spend their time begging, with 75% doing so for more than 12 hours a day.
- Only 5% of those sleeping on the streets in Arusha admitted to using drugs, and none did so in Moshi.
- In Moshi no youth admitted to involvement in prostitution, whilst in Arusha, eight CYP admitted to involvement in prostitution and classified it as work (five female, three male).
- 13% of full-time street children claimed that they were attending primary school daily, as did 17% of part time children. This is extraordinary - given our assumptions that life on the streets precludes attendance at school - and warrants further study to understand how these children are managing their lives and education.
- 30% of CYP had recently completed primary education.

When children are abused within the homes and communities there are no resources, procedures or measures in place to either prevent the abuse or to help children heal from it. This census uncovered that:

- An average of 53% of all street children and youth reported that their parents or another adult in the household swore, insulted, put them down or acted in a way that they thought they might be physically hurt.
- 28% of all children and youth interviewed said that there was never enough to eat in their homes.
- 26% said that their parents' drinking very often interfered with their care.
- 44% of those interviewed had been the victims of or witnessed violence at some point.
- 14% said that they very often felt very afraid, stressed for a long period of time, have nightmares or fear for their safety.

The suburbs of Moshi and Arusha are important sources for street children and youth. In Arusha the following percentage of children and youth on the streets (either full time or part time) came from these suburbs: Arusha Ngaramtoni = 12% (n. 125); Arusha Ngarenaro = 9% (n. 91); Arusha Unga Ltd = 8% (n. 83); Arusha Esso = 7% (n. 68); Arusha Majengo = 8% (n. 78). Likewise, the suburbs of Moshi are a source of street children. Specifically these are: Moshi Njoro = 18% (n. 187); Moshi Pasua = 10% (n. 100); Moshi Kiboriloni = 7% (n. 70); and notably, the 6 streets that comprise of Majengo continue to be a cumulative source of street children with a total of 13% (n. 131).

## What does this all mean?

Firstly, we don't believe that this reflects a real reduction in the number of vulnerable children and young people. Rather, we argue that this shift reflects the aging of the street child population. Specifically, as the population of CYP ages, we are seeing more adolescents and young adults relying on the street environment for their survival over the longer term. This is because they have spent a significant part of their childhood and adolescence in this environment, and whilst honing their survival skills, they have missed out on education and development opportunities that would enable them to function more successfully within mainstream society. This has implications for the type of support they need to disengage from the streets and better function in society. In this regard, this census reinforces findings from research undertaken in Kenya (Ayuku et al, 2003) which argued that it was necessary to make structural distinctions within the street child population and for the planning and policy to be adopted for specific subgroups. Support with business skills, access to credit, peer support and the mentoring by positive adult role models are all strategies that would enable these youth to re-enter mainstream society.

Secondly, the 2006 census reveals that the suburbs of Moshi and Arusha are now both important sources of children and youth who come to the streets. Many single parents and nuclear families without extended family support populate these communities and social services are limited and fragmented. Mkombozi's experience is that where there is community cohesion, children are increasingly put centre stage and protected from abuse. Although there is an array of reasons that affect whether an individual child leaves home or not for the streets, Mkombozi sees a combination of economic pragmatism and flight from abusive family situations as being the primary motivations of children and youth to come to the streets - especially in the case of Moshi and Arusha suburbs.

Finally, it is also notable that CYP continue to migrate to urban centres in search of employment and opportunities. In fact, many of these young people are adopting an opportunistic approach to their situation looking at the street as a road towards self-determination and advancement.

## Conclusion:

Mkombozi argues that there is an enormous and largely untapped potential residing in Tanzania's vulnerable and street youth, and that helping them to find it is a key part of the healing process. Given the difficulties in leaving the streets once a youth becomes entrenched in the street culture, we and other agencies, need to engage in research, advocacy for policy and the development of services that work with children and youth who are at risk of becoming homeless. Mkombozi advocates that we need to address the issue of children and youth on the streets, not as a "problem" whereby individuals are penalised and stigmatised, but rather as a collective failure in policy making. We must urgently address the lack of investment in education and protection services for children, and employment and recreation opportunities for youth.