



“Perception” Survey:

Survey of community members’ perceptions of children who are living/working in the streets

1. Introduction

“Children live in the streets because they lack values, some are orphans and others are those whose parents have divorced.”

“I would like the government and different religious groups to cooperate in gathering street children and knowing where their homes are, so they will know more about why they left.”

“The government should build schools where they can be educated, and if its possible they should not leave the compound of this school until they start knowing how to read and write.”

Mkombozi raises awareness in Moshi and Arusha target communities and town locations - the objective is to increase public understanding about root causes of child migration to the streets. During 2008 and 2009, this was accomplished in part via educational drama performances in Moshi and Arusha urban market places where a number of children live, work and interact with many community members on a daily basis. In 2009, as a means to learn and reflect on its own work, Mkombozi used the opportunities provided by drama performances to conduct a survey of community members’ perceptions of children who live / work in the streets, while (at the same time) evaluating the impact of its own awareness raising.

This report, presenting the findings of the survey, accounts for a number of perceptions and assumptions that exist within the community around this issue. More specifically, it uncovers general ideas about the reasons why children end up in the streets, as well as associated ideas about what should be done to address the situation. This survey report also offers a brief analysis of findings and a discussion about how different perceptions might lead to different kinds of social action for children. Finally, the present survey report reflects on further research of communal perceptions and attitudes and how this can be of relevance for strategy development and application of Mkombozi’s programmes.

2. Purpose of the survey

The survey was conducted with the objective to learn more about how people perceive children who are in the streets - more specifically, why community members believe children are in the streets, and what these children are like. The aim was to use the insights gained from the survey findings as a baseline that can inform Mkombozi’s continuous communal awareness raising around child migration to the streets. By applying a methodology which produces results that are open

PHOTOS: Various images of Mkombozi’s local drama performances where survey data was collected. (CREDIT: Anna Thor)

to interpretation and analysis, another goal of the survey was to generate discussion and reflection within the organisation - leading to insights that improve our programmes. Readers of this survey report are encouraged to bear in mind that the survey has its limitations (which are explained as they are encountered); however, it is merely intended to provide a glimpse of what might be found if community members' perceptions were further explored. Notably, it should be mentioned that the survey provided a fortunate consequence - a measure of the impact of Mkombozi's awareness raising drama - accomplished via an additional (separate) data collection (and which took place after the audience had viewed the play). However, the presentation and analysis of that drama-specific data is beyond the scope of this report and is documented separately.

3. Methodology and scope of the survey

The survey collected data from 106 individuals during eight occasions in six different venues in Moshi and Arusha towns. The data collection was conducted ahead of Mkombozi's educational drama performances - most of which took place in Moshi and Arusha urban market places in front of a more or less random audience. Several staff members, along with the drama troupe, carried out the data collection in a team effort - an actor informed the whole audience about the purpose of the survey while staff handed out and collected the questionnaire, providing clarification and assistance to individual respondents.

In choosing a methodology for this task, our main consideration was the nature of the setting - often busy, noisy environments in which people are constantly on the move. Therefore, data collection needed to be swift and reach multiple individuals, while also capturing their language and expressions. It was decided that a questionnaire which asked open-ended questions would fill this specific need. After an initial testing round, it was discovered that people were more willing to participate if handed a short and simple questionnaire. In its final form, the questionnaire was a small, simple sheet of paper which asked: 1) Why do some children go to live in the streets?, and 2) What are your views about children who live in the streets?

In order to register the findings from the survey, the questionnaires were first typed into a single document - this would provide an overview that would assist in eventual data analysis. Following this, they were studied and categorised in terms of thematic areas which emerged from what survey respondents had written. This process was undertaken by two Mkombozi staff members, and as it turned out, the ongoing discussions which emerged during the process added much value in the data interpretation where respondents' comments were difficult to categorise. Had this work been conducted by only one person, the findings might have turned out slightly different. It should be mentioned that since most respondents gave several answers to both questions, and since their answers were interpreted from various angles, most responses fall into several categories. Therefore, the total number of responses in the various categories greatly outnumbers the number of actual respondents.

ADVANTAGES OF THE METHODOLOGY:

- Despite its limitations, this methodology still makes available respondent's words and expressions through their own writing, and therefore shows us the many angles from which the occurrence of children being in the streets is viewed and understood.
- Due to the simple nature of the questionnaire, the data was rather easy to compile and interpret.

CHALLENGES OF THE METHODOLOGY:

- Some people might have been restricted from participating due to lack of literacy.
- Due to the random group of respondents, there was little possibility to follow up the respondents to further explore or clarify their comments and views, once the filled questionnaires were handed over to staff.
- Due to the voluntary participation, it was difficult to get a respondent group which was balanced in terms of age and gender - one of the limitations of the data is that it has a much lower representation of women than men.
- Even though many people were able to express themselves adequately in the written word, others filled the questionnaires in ways that were difficult to comprehend.
- In comparison to the total size of the audience on each performance occasion (approximately 150-250 people), proportionally very few were actually willing to fill the questionnaires.
- With respect to the questionnaire's second question, the answers that were given did not directly answer the question as we had intended it. A lesson learned here is that if we wish to discover people's perceptions of a situation, we should not directly ask what their views are, we should formulate much more specific questions.

PROFILE OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS:

- Gender = Men: 81 / Women: 24 / Unknown: 1
- Age = 0-18: 13 / 19-29: 49 / 30-39: 26 / 40-49: 6 / 50-59: 2 / Above 60: 1
- Education = Primary: 56 / Secondary: 33 / Tertiary: 5 / Never enrolled: 2 / Unknown: 10

4. Survey findings and interpretation

1) WHY DO CHILDREN MIGRATE TO THE STREETS?

The following paragraphs present respondents' answers to the question "Why do children migrate to the streets?", and include themes that were mentioned by at least five people. Altogether, it provides a rather diverse set of theories and thoughts about what causes children to go to the streets.

■ 66 of 106 respondents indicated poverty as a causative or contributing factor to child migration to the streets - making it the most commonly held perception. The respondents had various ways of expressing this. Most of them used quite general phrases, such as simply writing "poverty" (umaskini) or "the harshness of life" (masiha/mazingira magumu), while others mentioned "lack of food and clothes" as the reason. Several variations could be found among these expressions. One person wrote that: "the first reason is the difficult state of people's economy", while a few people more specifically mentioned how the family's economy might have arisen and how this has led children to escape their homes. For example, one respondent wrote that children are in the streets "because their parents lack employment, they live difficult lives in the village, and this causes them to move to the city and sleep in the streets".

■ 41 of 106 respondents indicated orphanhood as a causative or contributing factor - making this the second most commonly held perception. In the past, local communities readily shared responsibility in caring for needy/orphaned children among extended families and the wider community; but this mechanism is gradually deteriorating as a result of the socioeconomic crisis that Tanzania has undergone (Lugalla & Kibassa 2003). Thus, this finding may symbolise the gradual departure from such traditional systems in contemporary Tanzania - especially considering that most respondents mentioned orphanhood as an isolated reason, rather than referring to gaps in familial and communal safety nets as a contributing factor.

■ 9 of 106 respondents indicated failure of extended family members to take care of their kin's children is a reason for children to end up in the streets. This indicates that for some, the extended family is still an obvious alternative for orphans.

■ 28 of 106 respondents indicated abuse, neglect, discrimination and conflict in the home as causative factors. Of these factors, 10 respondents mentioned abuse, eight mentioned neglect and two mentioned discrimination by extended family members and step-parents with whom children live. One person wrote that "some are abused by their relatives, especially those who are orphans", and another that "they are abused by their parents due to the father marrying a stepmother". Furthermore, conflict in the home (described as "arguments in the family", or "parents fighting") was noted as a causative factor by eight of the 28 respondents in this category.

■ 23 of 106 respondents indicated lack of "parental care" (malezi) or "good parental care" (malezi bora), or because of receiving "bad parental care" (malezi mabaya/mabovu). Some respondents also indicated the provision of basic needs - for example: "its because of being deprived of good parental care, that is; education, food, clothes and shelter". Therefore, one can say that "parental care" might be related to the category of poverty, although it might also contain elements of care which are less connected to household economy, and that might even indicate neglect or lack of proper parenting behaviour by some caregivers.

■ 21 of 106 respondents indicated failure to receive basic education as the reason children leave their homes. As one respondent expressed: "children go to live in the streets because of the inability to get an education, since many children have not been able to get an education due to their parents poverty." This could, again, be seen as related to poverty, but could also be kept separate since poverty is not the only reason that a child is deprived of an education.

■ 9 of 106 respondents indicated disease (mainly HIV/AIDS) has critically affected family life by parental deaths, and thus as a consequence, many children are living in the streets.

■ 9 of 106 respondents suggested that children themselves had chosen or decided to leave home. One respondent wrote: "Because of a difficult situation in the home, the family is in a desolate condition and therefore they decide to live in the streets where they believe that they will have the freedom to do as they wish". Another simply expressed: "some decide themselves to live in the streets." Overall, such comments were rare - most people tended to regard migration to the streets as having been caused by something beyond the child's control, or as an event in which they were somewhat passive.

■ 6 of 106 respondents suggested that children go to the streets simply because they are "hooligan", "stubborn" or "disagreeable" (wakorofi, watundu, wajeuri) - indicating that the child's own characteristics are the reason for their lifestyle.

■ 6 of 106 respondents suggested lack of parental education / work as a reason children go to the streets. In the words of one respondent: "you find that their parents live a difficult life (and) don't have jobs, they fail in raising them".

■ 5 of 106 respondents mentioned lack of parental values as a causative factor. One person wrote that "the parents are careless in teaching their children, very many parents are careless in taking care of their children".

■ 5 of 106 respondents suggested lack of family planning as an underlying reason that children live in the streets - that is, unplanned pregnancies and/or having too many children are the (indirect) reasons that children are not cared for and consequently end up in the streets.

Brief analysis:

Considering the rather multifaceted nature of the data presented above, there are many possible angles from which an analysis could be made. In this report, we have chosen to narrow down the analysis to the data which seem more relevant to our work, and therefore the following paragraphs merely focus on a part of the findings.

Among the responding community members, poverty and orphanhood were by far the most frequently stated reasons for child migration to the streets - while abuse, neglect and/or family conflict were awarded less attention. From Mkombozi's point of view, these data reflect a lack of awareness around the nature of relationships between children and their caretakers as a causative factor. In fact, not a single respondent directly mentioned lack of quality relationships or lack of love as part of their comments. Needs of children, as captured by the responding community members, were rather expressed in terms of basic needs and education. How does this perception connect to children's own views of the reasons for which they left their homes?

A national survey on children in the streets (CSC 2009), performed in Tanzanian town and city centres in 2009, shows that even though poverty and orphanhood are significant contributing factors, violence, lack of love and family conflict are the leading causative factors stated by children and young people themselves. Under the reservation that Mkombozi's survey certainly has its limitations, this indicates a discrepancy between how the situation is viewed by the responding community members and how it is experienced by the children and youth in question. In other words, it reveals a lack of communal attention around violence or poor familial relationships as perceived reasons for children coming to the streets.

2) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN THE STREETS?

When asked this question, almost all respondents actually expressed wishes or opinions about possible solutions to the problem - an unintended outcome of the survey. Therefore, we chose to categorise the responses according to what people think could and should be done about the situation. This question was answered by 96 respondents - slightly fewer than the first.

NOTE: A reservation here is that the data might look different if the question had been specifically asked, "What should be done to address the situation?"

What did the respondents think should be done about the situation?

- The most common expression by respondents was that children who are in the streets should "be given help". In fact, 31 of 96 respondents expressed this in general terms without further elaboration, or in reference to meeting children's basic needs. In addition, 36 people mentioned that children in the streets should be helped to get an education - for example: "the government should give them schools so that they can become educated, and then later they will live well". From such comments, it can be interpreted that education was by many respondents seen as a necessary step towards a better life for these children.
- 15 of 96 respondents wrote that children who live in the streets should be placed in institutions that are run by either the government or non-governmental organisations. One respondent wrote "if they are seen in the streets they should be taken and brought to orphanages", and another wrote "the government should build schools where they can be educated, and if it is possible they should not leave the compound of this school until they start knowing how to read and write."
- 7 of 96 respondents wrote that children in the streets should first be gathered in one place (kuwakusanya pamoja) in order to receive help. As one person wrote: "my suggestion is to gather them all together and bring them to orphanages".
- 6 respondents suggested that educating families and the community is part of the solution to the situation. One person wrote that "education is needed in the whole community in order for us to leave this problem behind", and another that "education for the community should be given to Tanzanians about how the child of your neighbour is also yours". Comments like this once again point to the presence of the traditional child-rearing system that is gradually breaking down on a community level.
- 6 of 96 respondents mentioned that development and improvements to the economy is a possible solution. For example: "to improve the life of people in villages and cities, to improve the fulfillment of basic needs in town and the village - communication, education, health care, etcetera". Considering that poverty was cited the most common reason to why children go to live in the streets, one could have expected that even more people would have made such statements.
- 5 of 96 respondents suggested part of the solution is to first examine or understand the reasons why children go to the streets. As one individual put it: "I would like the government together with different religious groups to cooperate in gathering street children and getting to know where their homes are, then they will know more about the main reason why they left."
- 5 people mentioned that the children who are in the streets should be helped with psychological help, advice and/or by being taught better values. An example of this was "let them be told the negative consequences of living in the streets".
- Notably, the idea that children should be returned to their families was almost non-existent among respondents. One did make the unique suggestion, however, that "these children need to be followed up in terms of their family, some should be brought back to their homes and those who can be helped should be brought to school etcetera."

During analysis of these findings, we counted the number of respondents that suggested solutions which, on some level, prevent children from coming to the streets in the first place, as opposed to solutions which merely address the situation of children who are already in the streets. It was found that 36 of 96 individuals suggested preventative measures, ranging from improvements in the economy and government systems to strengthening family income, cohesion and family planning. Some of the responses we chose to interpret in this manner were: “every parent should be close to their family; this could decrease the whole issue of street children”, “to give parents good education and give children better values”, and “I would like to advise parents to cooperate with teachers, and every parent should make sure their child reaches school. Also, for those [children] who are poor, their parents should announce themselves so that they can be given help, because there are schools that offer help.”

Who do the respondents see as responsible for changing the situation?

During the course of the analysis, we became aware that people suggested solutions for the situation in relation to the actors that they felt were responsible to bring about the solutions. We thought it would be interesting to view this in the light of responsibility for children who are in the streets; that is, who (according to survey respondents) is responsible for changing or preventing the situation? This question is interesting and highly relevant to Mkombozi considering that we work to engage private individuals, government institutions, NGOs and communities around the issue of children in the streets. Altogether, 55 respondents of the 96 expressed opinions related to who is responsible for children in the streets, and many actually mentioned several actors in the same response. In fact, eight respondents specifically wrote that the problem should be addressed through a cooperation between different actors in society.

■ 36 respondents of the 55 mentioned the government as being responsible for either responding to, or preventing, the situation. One person wrote “In my opinion, the government should track families that are unable to support themselves, and help them with education and clothes”, and another that “I think that the government should build institutions for raising these children”. Notably, “the government” was mentioned in rather general and unspecific terms, with the exception of one respondent who suggested that “I think that every ten cell leader must know his/her people and how they live, and if he/she sees that there are families who are having problems, this should be reported to a health care institution or the village leader.”

■ 16 of the 55 indicated that the community should take responsibility for the situation - most likely representing the traditional norm of extended family systems and local social safety-nets. One person wrote: “To work together us relatives, community and friends so that we can help them get out of the disaster of suffering. Let's help them in terms of education, advice and even money. I plea the community of Tanzania to look into this matter of street children.”

■ 12 of the 55 mentioned the role of non-governmental organisations (including NGOs and religious organisations) in taking care of children who are in the streets. As one respondents wrote: “Let's find them organisations that can care for them, let them be given clothes and schooling, let them be given opportunities for doing business”.

■ 7 of the 55 mentioned the family as responsible for the children, and as one person expressed, part of the solution could be “for every parent to be close to their family, this can reduce the whole issue of street children”.

Brief analysis:

This data shows that people think of a variety of solutions to the situation of children living in the streets, and more interestingly, that some of the suggested solutions are responsive (meeting the needs of children who are already in the streets), and some are preventative. The fact that a high number of people display consciousness around preventative solutions on the systemic, as well as the familial level, could indicate a potential receptiveness around communal engagement that aims to prevent children from coming to the streets.

On the basis of these findings, another insight for Mkombozi is that a rather large portion of community members believe that the situation of children in the streets is actually the responsibility of local government. This is notable, because, in its day-to-day work, Mkombozi often gets the impression that the community believes this to be the responsibility of NGOs. These findings however show that even if people have become used to the common solution of children's centres and orphanages run by NGOs, they can still be of the opinion that the primary responsibility should lie with the government. It would be interesting to further validate this particular finding through surveying a higher number of respondents.

Considering the wealth of themes and issues raised by the community members responses, we initially had the idea to create a number of variables for further analysing the correlation between the first and second question. Such variables would, for example, examine whether it is the same respondents that mention orphanhood as a causative factor who also suggest institutional residence for children as a possible solution, and whether people who mention poverty as a reason for children leaving home also believe that these children are the responsibility of the government. We felt that such further analysis might reveal some of the underlying rationales and beliefs behind certain suggestions. However, when we attempted such a cross-check of variables, we realised that, due to the limitations of the survey's scope and methodology, this would mean stretching the interpretation of data too far. This is true because many respondents gave several answers to both questions, making it impossible for us to determine which parts of the answers in the two questions might be linked together.

Thus, at this point, we simply note the possibility of a further, more in-depth study with qualitative methodology to discover the beliefs and assumptions that underlie existing interventions for children who are in the streets.

5. Discussion and reflection

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS AND SOCIAL ACTION:

The findings of this small survey inspire reflection on the connection between people's perceptions and actual social action on the issue. How strongly does the community's perceptions of the situation influence the way people engage (or disengage) with it? How does this ultimately affect the reality of children's lives? The majority of respondents mentioned poverty as a reason that children migrate to the streets. It could be argued that such a view holds limited potential for increased communal action on the issue since systemic poverty is often perceived by families / neighbourhoods as beyond their control. Also, a strong communal perception around poverty as the primary causal factor might lead to responses that mainly address children's basic needs while overlooking other aspects of their protection. It is notable as well that orphanhood was the second ranked factor leading children to the streets. While the present survey is unable to confirm such an assumption, we wonder if this might be the reason that a number of respondents recommend institutions as a solution. Also, might it be a reason that so few mentioned that the family is responsible for these children?

As previously noted, a recent national survey documented that the most common reasons for children to leave home, according to the children themselves, are violence, lack of love and family conflict (CSC 2009). Interestingly, relatively few respondents mentioned such factors. This begs the question: If people were aware of how often children actually go to the streets for these reasons, would their suggestions for solutions be any different - perhaps geared more towards legal interventions or holding families accountable in how they raise their children? Only further research can answer such questions.

THE ISSUE OF RESPONSIBILITY:

Tanzania is undergoing a gradual departure from having the village community and extended family as the primary duty bearers for children, to having the (relatively newly formed) state and governance functions as ultimately responsible - bodies which are not yet able to uphold this role in a practical sense. Thus, the question of responsibility for children in the streets, as highlighted in the interpretation of the survey's second question, raises difficult questions in contemporary Tanzania. Judging from the respondents' views, there is an existing perception that the community is responsible for children who live in the streets or are at the risk of going to the streets - something that holds great potential for children's protection. At the same time, it is striking how many respondents mentioned the government as responsible for helping poor families as well as housing and educating children who have ended up in the streets. It is safe to say that this contrast symbolises the new social and political era that Tanzania has gradually entered - wherein government is ultimately responsible for citizen's welfare and protection.

What implications exist for Mkombozi's work if a widely spread view is that children in the streets are the responsibility of the government? Possibly, it simply means that, in public opinion, there is a good opportunity for advocacy work which aims to build the capacity of the government to care for vulnerable children. It might also imply that since traditional safety-nets for children are gradually deteriorating under the pressure of wider social and economic changes (Lugalla & Kibassa 2003), interventions that aim to preserve this aspect of communal life might attract less and less interest in the years to come. Even though these are speculations, they are nevertheless crucial issues for Mkombozi to reflect upon.

"Community work" is a rather common focus among civil society organisations, as it is for Mkombozi. In the light of a prevailing public perception that the government is ultimately responsible for children who are in the streets, it is important for Mkombozi to remain conscious about how our community work connects to peoples perceptions of their responsibilities, and how it connects to building a stronger government with expanded capacity to protect children.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

This survey has simply scraped the surface of a wealth of knowledge that exists about community perceptions - data that could be accessible through more qualitative and in-depth methodology. It has, however, been found that exploring community views of the situation offers a wealth of angles from which it can be viewed, interpreted and addressed. It has also implied that perceptions about why children go to the streets are likely to be connected to people's suggestions for ways to address it. Returning to the aim of this survey, a lesson learned is that there is a need for further awareness around the root causes of child migration to the streets - in particular around violence, neglect, domestic conflicts and negative child/caregiver relationships. In addition, it has been shown that there is a need for awareness of innovative and appropriate ways to address the problem beyond residential care provision. Mkombozi believes that if children are to be prioritised and protected at the local level, a shift must take place in the way they are perceived and positioned in society. It is up to us as an organisation to improve programme design, to reflect on communal acceptance and application of our programmes, and to practice the values that we promote in local communities. In particular, what type of communal perceptions create a receptive environment for promoting child protection and non-tolerance towards violations of children's rights? This is one of the critical questions that Mkombozi must answer through further research and application of the knowledge gained.

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