

## Children day-care centres built around Maasai Bomas

The Oldonyo Sambu, Oljoro, Musa, Bwawani and Makiba wards in Meru and Arusha districts have made commendable changes in respect to protection and safeguarding of children's rights following an awareness creation and sensitisation project implemented by Centre for Women and Children Development (CWCD).

The formation of special committees dealing with children issues in the five wards and consequential establishment of community initiated and run children's day-care centres are the clear signs that children's rights and development issues now have proper handling in the area.

The project implemented by the Centre for Women and Children Development with funding from the Foundation for Civil Society was aimed at increasing the understanding of the community on policies and laws that protect children and hence to increase adherence to those laws resulting into reduction of violation of children's rights especially those in difficult conditions at grass roots level.

Emmanuel Joseph Nyimba who is the coordinator chosen from among the five wards Children Committees is one of those who could heartedly express their appreciation to the project. He looks that project as liberation to the community around the five wards and nearby areas, especially to the Maasai who are dominant inhabitants of the areas.

"Now, changes can clearly be seen; before the implementation of the project, many children could not attend school, instead they were mostly engaged in herding animals. Also, FGM, early marriages of girls and stigma to AIDS orphans and those with disabilities were common." He said

After sensitisation from CWCD, villagers soon agreed to establish committees special for dealing with children issues only. The notable fruits of those committees are the children's day-care centres established around Maasai Bomas. The children day-care centres were initiated by the community and are run by the community as well. Those centres do not only serve for caring of children and their initial education (preparation for primary education), but also as nutritional, talents and creativity promotion centres.

As well, the committees have helped to disclose a number of children with disabilities and AIDS orphans who were hidden and locked inside Bomas hence denying their education and other basic childhood rights.

"Also, we have agreed to fight for child labour whereby we charge a fine of Tsh. 10,000/= especially to drivers who come into our villages to take sand or crops when we find them using children to load their vehicles". Nyimba said.

“We take those youths who have completed standard seven and who are somewhat clever as caretakers of the day-care centres. The community contributes some token amount of money for the caretakers to assist them at least to buy soap and other small needs. Also, community members contribute for food and other requirements for the children at the centres” ., Nyimba added.

According to Nyimba, even the elders have found those centres as places where they can also teach some morals and ethics to children while spending their free time hence helping in upbringing the children.

He said that they first started with 60 children in the centres but now the number has gone up to 200.

“Community members have agreed to take anything they find appropriate from a person who is found guilty of withdrawing his/her child from attending the day-care centres” Prosper Munuo, the Programme Officer of CWCD responsible for the Children.



*Children learning in one of the classes built by the Maasai community to serve as day-care centres and to provide for early childhood education. The seats of the classes are made of soil as per the economic capability of the community.*

## Women and children rescued



*Ms Hindu Ally Mbwego, the Director of CWCD*

Ms Hindu Ally Mbwego, the Director of CWCD is proud of a number of issues resulted from implementation of the project. She says, when the project was introduced in the area most of villagers were not well informed about children living in difficult situation. They thought that children in difficult situation are only street children found in town. But, after the sensitisation process they were astonished to find quite a number of children living in difficult situation.

***“They brought us many children with disabilities, orphans, victims of HIV/AIDS, children from extremely poor families, children forced to marry at young age and children involved in child labour. They assumed we are the ones who have the final solution.”*** Ms Mbwego said.

“Children victims of HIV/AIDS were discriminated and stigmatised. They were left to live alone in the Boma for fear that they will infect others. What others did was just to

bring them food, but not to share food with them or to sleep with them in one house." She added.

Members of the community were sensitised to form special committees to deal with children matters in every ward. Appreciably, every ward was able to form a committee. The committees facilitated among others, the establishment of eight children's day-care centres, control of early marriages, control of FGM, and identification of children in difficult situation including orphans, children with disabilities and those from extremely poor families.

***"Children can now learn at least counting and Kiswahili in those centres, they can show their creativity and talents, they can get food and we hope it will also contribute to simplify primary school enrolment starting from next year. Also, having those centres, women are now able to leave their children in the day-care centres and deal with other income generating activities like farming, plaiting and making of necklaces."*** Ms Mbwego clarified.

In addition, the project has helped in identification and different schools enrolment of many orphans, children with disabilities and others who were about to lose their right for education. One list displayed by Ms Mbwego shows 37 orphans and 18 children with disabilities already identified just in one village; Likamba.

"We have established a network with the elders, councillors, village executive officers and the police to identify and deal with the issue of girls who are forced into marriage at early childhood age. Through that network, we have already succeeded to save one girl and managed to enrol her at Edmund Rice Secondary School" she added.



***The three languages learning process:***

***Maasai:*** Nabo, are, uni, ung'wani, imieti, ile, napishana, , isieti, indulumi, tomoni

***Swahili:*** Moja, mbili, tatu, nne, tano, sita, saba, nane, tisa, kumi

***English:*** One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten

*Children are learning to count using Sodom Apple (Solanum Incanum) to symbolise cattle owing to their pastoralist culture. For instance, subtraction is done by taking some "cattle" out of the "shed" as symbolised by the sticks on the photo.*

**Dissatisfied mutilators design a trick to cheat male elders**

After having intensive sensitisation, many mutilators have decided to leave that business and have joined White Ribbon Alliance where they get training on safe midwifery skills in order to reduce the rate of children and maternal deaths as well as FGM.

In the process, some mutilators openly revealed that they were dissatisfied with FGM since before, but were forced to continue doing it by male elders. Having disclosed that secret, they agreed to formulate a trick to pretend mutilation to cheat the male elders.

"Men don't go into the huts where mutilation is undertaken, they only escort women and girls up to the place and remain outside at a distance to wait for the women to undertake mutilation. A viva voice from the hut is the sign that the exercise has been

accomplished. Therefore, some mutilators have decided that they will be going into the huts and pretend that they are performing the exercise while they are not, and thereafter shouting viva. With that secret, many girls will be left unaffected." Ms Mbwego tipped.



*The then Deputy Minister for Education and Vocational Training Hon. Mwantumu Mahiza congratulating and encouraging to a new way of life, ex-female circumcisers who decided to leave that business and joined White Ribbon Alliance to learn standard and acceptable midwifery.*

## **A dependable centre**

Ms Mbwego could joyfully state "By mere implementation of a project funded by the Foundation for Civil Society, we are very proud that now we have become a greatly dependable centre for children and women issues." She added "the government in the district now depends on our statistics to establish the number of children living in difficult situation."

Also, following wide recognition, the centre was selected by the Arusha Region government to be visited by participants of the sub-regional conference on "Education for All" held from 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008 at AICC in Arusha as a demonstration centre on Community-based Early Childhood Development.

As well, a delegate of 28 Heads of Nursery Schools, Education Officers and Education Division Officers from Zanzibar visited the centre to learn about Community-based Early Childhood development skills as implemented by the centre from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2008.



*Children at Ilkerin in Mussa ward clapping hands, as they are charmingly welcoming visitors from Zanzibar who visited their day-care centre to learn on how community-based children day-care centres and early childhood education are implemented by the established children's committees in Meru district.*