



Working To Empower : Life in Mwambangu
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Baraka is city in the southern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo near Lake Tanganyika. To arrive here one has to drive along the shore of the lake from Uvira on a patch of severely bumpy, muddy, and waterlogged dirt for six hours. The drive is actually quite beautiful with colorful surroundings, green mountains, and a nice breeze coming off the huge lake. Mwambangu is near Baraka, a twenty minute walk away, where I visited one night while working in the area.

Upon my arrival the children, of which there were clearly out numbering the adults, ran around me laughing and screaming being so happy that a mzungu (white person) came to their village. After the initial chaos of the excited children I met some ladies who ran an association of illiterate women. One of their main objectives is to keep track of and house the orphans in the village. When there are orphans, and currently there are forty-eight, they find host families to take care of the children – currently there are 34 families taking care of these children. In a place where each tiny house hold about twelve people, it makes one wonder where all these children came from. The women explain to me, “the reason for orphans here is the war, secondly disease, but mostly the war.” When I asked if the orphaning had stopped now that the war had ended they responded, “although the war is finished there will continue to be orphaning because of continued fighting and disease.”



Many children, not just the orphans, do not attend school because of the school fees and costly school uniform. School fees start at \$1.25 USD per month for primary and \$2 USD per month for secondary. The uniforms cost \$10 and \$15 USD respectively. A bag and shoes, which are required, cost an additional \$10 USD. In the village the women estimate that there are about 1500 children, not including those too young for school – primary starts at age six. Another four-hundred are of age but do not attend because of the costs. The nearest school is almost full, but if they could pay, “our children would walk to be in school”, they explain. An additional problem about the school size is the regular return of refugees from Tanzania, who are helped to get into school by UNHCR. Those who remained in the village during the war still are without any help.

The women tell me that the village needs both an orphanage and a school, as the closest is 1 and 3 km away. Upon walking away from the village of young people I could not just leave all these children. As a result, Working To Empower now runs a new program called ‘Emebet Education Program,’ where students fees and uniforms will be paid for. There are many criteria, and due to the vast demand WTE will begin only with the orphan children. Working To Empower is looking for donations for this program, which costs about \$1500 USD per year to allow fifty children to attend school. For more information about the program please feel free to contact WTE or browse the other documents about this program.