

## **“Eleven year old girls can be confident coaches”**

by Cocky Van Dam, MTG Football Coordinator

MTG's coach the coach programme started in 2005 when I joined MTG in 2005 as a “football development worker” through VSO. The idea was to set up a coaching programme that would eventually lead to a group of girls being able to train other girls as coaches. I remember that I did this nice participatory needs-assessment as I had been taught during the VSO workshops that were organized to prepare VSO volunteers for their placements. Girls identified areas that they thought they could improve on and when I asked them how they thought about themselves as coaches on a scale between 1 and 10 (very European, I guess), the average score was 9! Those MTG coaches were confident! For me the beautiful task to help them to become even better coaches (without undermining their confidence)!

From the start I worked together with an MTG volunteer, Janet Karemba Konde, one of MTG's most experienced coaches, a charismatic peer leader and a gifted football player. She introduced me to the girls and to people in the community that I needed to know. She translated in Kiswahili and Kigirima (and back) and helped me understand all those things a foreigner (Mzungu in Kenya) needs to understand when working in the community. We started working with three groups of girls in the three divisions where MTG held its activities and we started with what the girls indicated they thought they needed to learn: insight in football, personal qualities, football techniques, training/coaching skills.

### ***MTG coaches are unique!***

All MTG's coaches are girls and young women (between 11 and 25 years) that are also participants in our programme, just like all the other girls who could be referees, first aiders, peer educators or field committee members or just football players. Our experience is that girls from the age of eleven can be trained as coaches. Some of those young coaches are confident and not afraid to make mistakes. When girls reach adolescence, become aware of themselves and think that everybody is watching and criticising them it's sometimes more difficult for girls to be an effective leader. But the interesting thing of working with girls alone is that in MTG we don't have another option. So as staff in MTG we continuously encourage girls to take up leadership roles and we try to support them.



**Halima, 18 years, coaching new coaches**

Moving the Goalposts is a community based organization that, since 2002, uses football to empower girls in the rural and urban areas of Kilifi, Kaloleni and Ganze districts. MTG's goal is to have a more inclusive, just and peaceful world where girls' and women' human rights are realized and protected. Using a rights-based approach, MTG focuses primarily on sexual and reproductive rights, health and choice.

More than three thousand girls (aged 9 – 25 years) participate in MTG's tournaments and ongoing leagues. Girls are encouraged to take up leadership roles in their (football) community. The peer led health education program gives girls opportunities to learn about their rights and to claim them. It gives girls health information and assists them through one-to-one counseling. The economic empowerment program aims to improve young women's livelihoods.

MTG works with stakeholders in the communities and other partners in and outside Kenya and is recognized as an innovative and unique sport and development project for girls and young women in Kenya.

One of our major challenges is that girls in Kilifi lead very busy lives. The school system in Kenya is quite competitive with a stress on intellectual performance. Girls go for their normal classes, tuition before and after school time and during holidays and most of the girls have many household chores to do. Girls need to walk long distances to go to school, fetch water and firewood. Sometimes it's hard for young girls to balance all their responsibilities and also to be a good MTG members and leaders.

Overall parents, teachers and community members are supporting girls to participate in MTG activities, though sometimes it's hard for authorities to see girls becoming leaders, being more assertive and talking about their rights.

The stress on the football coaches' roles in the MTG curriculum that has evolved over time in three manuals written in Kiswahili is basically on football, leadership and role modelling. Though we realize that coaches can be very influential and play more roles in educating girls on various topics we also don't want to give the MTG coaches too many responsibilities and too much theory to master. After all our MTG coaches are not only coaches, but also daughters and students.



In the meantime MTG is still working to improve our MTG coaching curriculum. There are favorite topics and topics that still prove to be difficult. Some girls have followed other trainings like KISE/KNVB, GIZ/YDF and Premier Skills trainings so new elements have been included in our programme. Recently some of our coaches have been trained as Kicking Aids Out peer leaders so that will also be included. The coaches' responsibilities will expand and that of other leaders too.

After running the coach the coach programme for six years we have a group of girls that are MTG's coaching Trainers of Trainers (TOTs), and have inspired referees and first aiders to do the same. Those coaches have grown through the system where girls choose their own leaders and where they are held accountable by other girls. Girls that are active and show interest know that there are opportunities for them. You don't have to be a good football player to become a good leader!

The TOT's organize our monthly training days, train new coaches and new TOT's and they play a role in the coaching of our MTG United teams. No team is coached by any other coaches other than MTG girls' coaches. This makes MTG unique. With our MTG United team playing in the Football Kenya Limited Premier League this year it means that MTG is the first team with a female coach operating on the highest level in Kenya. And even more special: with a complete technical and supporting staff made up of women: young women below 26 years. MTG's motto is "Tunaweza", which means "We can". And that is certainly what these young women are showing!