

Youth culture in rural Mozambique

A study about the situation of young people in rural areas and their affiliation to culture, based on fieldwork in the districts of Nangade (Cabo Delgado), Mossurize (Manica) and Chókwe (Gaza)

Introduction

Young people are all the time expressing or attempting to express something about their actual or potential cultural significance.¹

Today, 1.5 billion people are aged 12–24 worldwide, 1.3 billion of them in developing countries, the most ever in history². In only a few years they develop from children to young adults, for most people one of the most challenging and marking transitions of their lifetime: Young people have to define their social and cultural identity and to become economically independent. They look for their place in society and acceptance from their community. They struggle with the dilemma of being dependent and at the same time having to take on new responsibilities.

Apart from these universal aspects of youth, rural youth in Africa are in a special situation: They mostly grow up in traditional communities where the life of one generation to the next used to be almost identical, structured by the cycles of human life. As rural communities today come more and more in touch with the modern, globalised world, their way of life will transform and the cyclic aspect loses importance. Cyclic time is transformed into linear time³: Each generation has distinct characteristics, influenced by the political, economic, technological and cultural circumstances of their time. Consequently the values and rules connected to the cyclic model of life are disappearing. Particularly in the areas of growing up, sexuality and choosing a partner, traditions are going through great transformations. Although young people today enjoy a personal freedom that previous generations did not have, they also suffer from a lack of traditional guidance and support. The ethical and cultural vacuum that young people experience today might put them at risk of failing to find their place in society.

Literature about youth in Africa confirms these premises pointing out that young people increasingly suffer from the loss of basic traditional values, guidance and family support. Chigunta argues that the family as the key socialisation agent in Africa has collapsed due to a number of causal factors. These include general social change, poverty, the 'feminisation' of poverty, the phenomenon of teenage pregnancies and the loss of family members due to the AIDS pandemic⁴. Community life is substantially affected by the decline of social networks, the disappearance of cultural values and, to a certain degree, growing violent and ruthless behaviour of people. Especially problematic for young people are the poor quality of education and the high youth unemployment rates.

Socialisation of young people is a complex process and various factors determine their successful integration into society. One of them is cultural expression. Young people seek a sense of stability to make up for the personal experience of change and a sense of self-esteem to compensate for the experience of powerlessness that they go through during

¹ Willis, P. 1990. *Common culture: Symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p. 1

² The World Bank, 2007, *Development and the next generation*, World Development Report 2007, Washington, p. xx

³ Erdheim, M. 1998. 'Adoleszenzkrise und institutionelle Systeme', in Apsel, R & Rost, W.-D. (eds), 1998. *Jugend und Kulturwandel*, Ethnopschoanalyse, Verlag Brandes & Apsel, Frankfurt, p. 10

⁴ Chigunta, F. 2002. *The socio-economic situation of Youth in Africa: Problems. Prospects and Options*, p. 6

adolescence. Youth culture is the result⁵. Part of it is a code of conduct among young people. It entails a set of specific dress codes but also movement, postures and facial expressions that are considered 'cool' for a certain generation or group. Coolness and physical attractiveness determine the acceptance and popularity of a young man or woman in their peer group and influence the adolescent's sense of self-esteem, his or her personality development and counts as one of the most important factors to be negotiated among young people.⁶ Music and dance are two of the common modes of expression to demonstrate, prove and negotiate attractiveness and coolness.

Traditional art forms generally give young people access to the cultural heritage of their ethnic group and offer some notion of citizenship. They also help to build identity and integrate young people into the community. More than that, creative activities strengthen civil society and provide alternative thinking models as a counterweight to state bureaucracies and other institutions. Today, youth culture is very much influenced by global trends that penetrate even remote villages and affect clothing, music, dances and lifestyle. Yet again, it confronts today's youth with a profound dilemma between conserving traditional art forms and values or transforming and creating their own cultural identity.

Youth in Mozambique

The population of Mozambique, as in most developing countries, is very young: an estimated 64 percent of the population in 2005 was younger than 24 years, 19.7 percent of those are 15-24 years old and the average age of the 20.07 million Mozambicans⁷ is around 17.7 years⁸. A large majority of the population remain in rural areas (around 66 percent⁹). Thus, rural youth are a significant group, and obviously is important for the political, economic, social and cultural future of the country.

For young people in Mozambique, the political changes of the last 15 years certainly provide opportunities and chances for a better future that previous generations could not even dream of. After around 30 years of armed conflict, today's youth is the first generation to live in peace and political stability. They gain increasing access to information, technology, knowledge and goods. They live in a more mobile world with better transport and communication facilities. However, those opportunities are only accessible to people with some financial means. Youth, especially in rural areas, have no access to money, adequate education or political power.

The empowerment of rural youth is imperative for the combating of absolute poverty and the development of rural communities. Therefore young people have to gain access to their talents and capacities and live with at least a minimum of dignity.

Aims and objectives of the research

This qualitative study is based on fieldwork carried out in the districts of Nangade (Cabo Delgado), Mossurize (Manica) and Chókwe (Gaza)¹⁰ and includes a review of some literature on youth in Africa and youth culture in general. It is an attempt to illuminate and understand the significance of culture and cultural activities for young people (12-24 years) in rural areas of Mozambique. It includes the assessment of the state of local traditional culture and the degree of exposure of people to imported, global culture. It also looks at the psychosocial

⁵ Frith, S. 1984. *The sociology of youth*, Causeway Press Ltd., Lancashire, p. 20

⁶ Danesi, M. 1994. *Cool: The Signs and Meanings of Adolescence*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-London, p. 37

⁷ Estimates census 2007

⁸ UN Population Division. 2006. *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision Population Database*, available: <<http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp>>

⁹ UNDP. 2006. *Human Development Report 2006*, available: <<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/countries>>

¹⁰ From July - September 2006

situation of youth in three districts and makes suggestions of how culture can contribute to the management of problems and risks of young people.

The three districts for the fieldwork were chosen as representatives of the three geographical zones of Mozambique (south, central, north) and are all either at or close to the border of a neighbouring country. This choice was motivated by the conviction that today's culture and lifestyle is increasingly affected by the exchange of goods, information, fashion and other cultural factors over greater distances and through media images.

The main economic activities in all districts are agriculture and some semi-legal cross-border trade. During the last few decades, all three districts were hit by armed conflicts and natural disasters. The development of the infrastructure of the three districts shows the typical decline from the south to the north of Mozambique: Of the three Nanagde in the north is by far the poorest, with the least access to communication and transport, without telephone or electricity, and with an especially difficult situation in education and employment.

The study is mainly based on the perception of young people themselves, their view of their culture, identities and living situation. The main research techniques were semi-structured interviews and focus groups discussions with young people but also semi-structured interviews with representatives of the district administration, older people, teachers, leaders of cultural groups, pastors, etc. The interviews with young people were always separated in same sex groups. During a stay of about two weeks in each district we could observe various activities of the community and visit schools, hospitals, police stations and other public institutions. In total, we interviewed 94 young people between the ages of 12 and 30 years, 25 additional informants and four groups of older people.

The fieldwork time was relatively short and did not allow more than superficial interactions with members of the communities. We tried to interview young people in very different living situations but had difficulties in accessing certain groups like teenage mothers or young people out of school. Nevertheless, the numerous conversations on the same topics with many different people reveal some common trends and allows us to draw a general picture of the socio-cultural situation of rural youth in Mozambique.

Free time activities and entertainment

Youth culture is particularly associated with leisure activities. [...] Because it's in their free time that young people most visibly behave independently, express non-adult tastes and values.¹¹

Most young interviewees stated that usually they were 'hanging around', 'doing nothing'. Analogously, many of them said that one of the biggest problems was the lack of entertainment and things to do. Rural youth have few choices and depend on existing infrastructure, equipment or institutions in their communities. Nevertheless their choices of activities show independent behaviour reflecting their personal tastes and what their peer group regards as cool.

Unorganised activities of young people include meeting friends, chatting and playing games. The most popular sport in all three districts is football and this for both boys and girls. Every village has a football field and most of them have local teams. A typical male activity in rural areas is to go to the bush to hunt or fish. Listening to the radio and music cassettes is common all over the country and as soon as solar panels or car batteries are available music is on in every corner of the village. In districts with electricity, a 'new' activity is taking over more and more: watching TV, in particular *tele novelas* and music videos, which have a strong impact on youth culture.

¹¹ Frith, S. 1984. *The sociology of youth*, Causeway Press Ltd., Lancashire, p. 3-4

Entertainment for adolescents does not just happen during the day, but at night as well. Many, especially young men, go out independently in the evenings. Bars are numerous and many villages have discotheques today, which are always packed at the weekends. Video clubs are very popular as well. They show Bollywood films, action movies and music videos. Young people explained that the movie was not the main reason to go there; it is a good place to meet a boy or girl and touch and kiss in the dark. Many girls insisted that they would never go to either the discotheque nor the video clubs because 'they are very dangerous places and only careless and irresponsible parents would allow their daughters to go there'.¹² Many adults argued that discotheques and video clubs were not good for local youth and sometimes would advocate for the closure of such venues.

Organised activities can be found in the areas of sport, religion, social commitment, or culture (see below): Depending on the region, either Christian or Islamic youth groups play an important role in occupying young people's time. Young Christians, for example, all go to Mass on Sunday morning and many are involved in other activities such as choir, dance group or social work. In Chókwe and Mossurize, activist groups such as Geração BIZ¹³ have been established for a while. However, in Nangade, PSSRAJ¹⁴ had started to recruit activists just months ago. Surprisingly the Organização da Juventude Moçambicana OJM, the national youth organisation, is of marginal importance to young people in the three districts. In Nangade and Mossurize it is not active at all and the regional OJM in Chókwe struggles to keep going.

The fieldwork in the three districts shows that the more traditional or modern structures or institutions exist, the more young people got actively involved or became motivated to set up their own structures like new football teams, dance groups or bands.

Dance and music

I like dancing: it makes you feel strong and agile and helps you forget all the problems around you but also because girls are very attracted to you. They come to see performances and admire you.¹⁵

Music is an expression from deep inside. If I have problems or a big anger, I take my guitar and they disappear. Somehow it has healing power and I forget time and space around me.¹⁶

In Africa, music and dance play an essential role in traditional culture. It is participatory with community members playing an active role in the performance and attributing a lot of respect to the dancers. As a result, dance contributes vitally to personal development, social integration and ethnic identity.¹⁷ It also plays an essential role during all rites of passage and is deeply anchored in the cultural knowledge of African people.

Cultural activities are popular among young people in the districts, in particular dancing and playing music. Especially high is the number of young people active in dance groups in Nangade (over 60 groups in the district). In Mossurize there are about 25 dance groups, the variety of dances being rather small. The number and types of groups in Chókwe is unknown, but in comparison to the other districts, they are fewer¹⁸. The number of groups

¹² Interview, Nangade 19 July 06

¹³ Largest activist movement against HIV/AIDS in Mozambique

¹⁴ Programa de Saude Sexual e Reprodutiva de Adolescente e Jovem

¹⁵ Interview, Muidumbe, 24 July 2006

¹⁶ Interview, Chókwe 16 Aug. 06

¹⁷ Nicholls, R. 1996. 'African Dance: Transition and Continuity', in Welsh Asante, K. (ed), 1996. *African Dance: an artistic, historical and philosophical inquiry*, African World Press Inc., Eritrea, p. 53

¹⁸ The ethnic groups in the south never had the abundance of dances and masquerades as the people in the north.

and dances in Nangade is stable or even growing, while they are diminishing in Mossurize and Chókwe where most active members there are adults over 40 years.¹⁹

At times schools offer dancing or singing as an extra-curricular activity, but usually with little continuity and without competent instructors. Schools and activist groups frequently facilitate theatre groups that produce mainly pieces about HIV/AIDS or other development related subjects. Unlike traditional groups, these groups primarily have to transfer a message. The enjoyment of local culture and the development of the artistic and creative capacities of their members are not part of their concern.

Many girls and boys expressed their wish to join a dance group but they encountered difficulties in finding a group in their area. De Fletter comes to comparable results in his study about Mozambican youth from 1999:

One of the more interesting findings arising from the study is the high level of priority given by youth from all three districts to culturally linked activities such as painting, sculpture, theatre, dancing etc but are prevented from doing so due to the lack of facilities.²⁰

In all the districts, there are young people who try out new forms of dance and music independently. In particular in Nangade such new dances, *danças novas*, are common. Successful *danças novas* are copied in the region and can spread out in short time to the whole Plano Alto. *Mapiko Na Upanga* is a good example: This dance was invented in 2000 by a group of boys in Muatide (Muidumbe) and has spread out very quickly across the whole region. Their dances are obviously inspired by music and movement from music videos and movies. 'In *Na Upanga*'s choreography one is able to track down the influence of all these images: Michael Jackson's dance steps, Bruce Lee's kicks and aggressive Chuck Norris' movements.'²¹ The result is a synthesis of fragments from different sources integrated into a culturally coherent ensemble. Such young groups enjoy an enormous freedom in transforming their dances and definitely enrich the cultural affluence of the country.

In Chókwe new groups were usually looking for inspiration from music videos and TV programs. They had little previous knowledge and skills in dance or music and were desperately looking for competent teachers but also spaces to meet and exchange with others.

Even more than other leisure activities the participation of young people in cultural activities depends on commitment and expertise of the local community. Dance and music need a lot of knowledge and practise to reach proficiency. The growing lack of skills and knowledge of traditional art forms limits the young generation's ability to create, interpret and develop their own cultural expression. In many districts of Mozambique this may lead to the disappearance of an important part of the intangible heritage a generation from now.

Youth culture, coolness and codes

In terms of visible features of youth culture such as clothing and hairstyle, the differences in the three districts were quite small. Financial means and the accessibility of the products determine their spread amongst young people. In every case, imported products are in high demand and successively change the look of young people.

Young men wear T-shirts with images of international stars. They usually dream of having a new pair of jeans, sunglasses and a baseball cap. They long to have their own bicycle, a

¹⁹ *Técnicos da cultura* of both district emphasised that groups disappear and some dances do not exist anymore.

²⁰ De Vletter, F. & de Werde, M. 1999. *Activities, aspirations and perceptions of Mozambican youth, a study of three key social-economic groups*, UNESCO, Maputo, p. 55

²¹ Israel, P. 2006. *Irony, Ambiguity and the Art of Recycling*, Third Text, Vol. 20, Issue 5, September, 2006, p. 590

motorbike or even a car. Young girls wear skirts, pants and short tops instead of the traditional *capulanas*. On special occasions, they might put on make-up and high-heels. Girls in Chókwe tend to wear shorter skirts, lower pants, more audacious tops and higher shoes than the girls in Mossurize and Nangade. To impress boys girls recommend looking good but also *mandar de stilo* (behave with style) or *mecher o corpo* (shake up the body). Most important to all young people is that one does not see the poverty: They always pointed out that one needs to be washed, brush one's teeth and wear clean clothes.

Obviously, modern clothing provokes the older generation a great deal. Especially the look of girls is subject to sharp comments. The girls themselves are careful about wearing certain clothes because '*trabalha as cabeças dos homens*' (it makes men's heads turn) but they also defend their choices: 'I do not care what other people think of me. I am a free person – this is democracy!'²²

Nangade Sede is a melting pot of many ethnic groups. Eight languages are spoken in the village. This affluence of cultures and languages has led to the development of a local slang that mixes expressions and words. There was no other explicit slang in the other districts. It seems common though that people in regions with several local languages start to mix them and use words and expressions of one language in another.

Money is definitely very high on the scale of coolness too: 'To be cool you need to have money in your pocket, that makes you feel strong.'²³ Young people stated many times that today's world makes it hard for them, as someone who has no money is a complete nobody. The trendy clothes and gadgets, the discotheque and video clubs, drinking and, for young men, relationships with girls, cost money. Their opportunities to earn money are very limited and there is a lot of frustration around that.

Adolescence – how to become an adult member of society

Regression of traditions and rejection of long-established values by the young generation seems to intensify all over Mozambique. Of the three districts the decline of traditional life is more advanced in Chókwe. Although the population of Mossurize has growing access to mass media and communication technologies people's personal experiences with modern life are still minimal. People in Nangade still live very traditionally but the decline of traditional values there is progressing too.

Many ethnic groups in northern Mozambique practice initiation rites.²⁴ In these communities only an initiated young man or woman is accepted as an adult member and has access to the privileges of adults, including taboos like sexuality or drinking. The rites have undergone various changes over the last decades. Today they are usually shorter in order not to interrupt school and the children are initiated at a younger age than before.²⁵ Due to early initiation and growing numbers of teenagers in school, young men and women today spend several years before getting married but with permission to access adult taboos. Considering that sex is an easily available form of entertainment in rural areas, with many teenagers being sexually very active, the initiation rites are often blamed for damaging moral principles and contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

All over Mozambique, it is a strong taboo for parents to talk with their children about sexuality. Therefore, all ethnic groups handed the instruction of adolescents over to third parties like masters of initiation, aunts, uncles or grandparents. Each boy or girl was

²² Interviews City of Chókwe, 15 Aug. 2006 and Espungabera, 2 Oct. 2006

²³ Interview with two young men, Espungabera, 30 Sept. 2006

²⁴ Makhuwa, Makonde, Mandonde, Mwuani, Masena, Manhanja (girls and boys) and Machope, Malomoe and Mandau (girls only).

²⁵ Today: 4-10 years old, earlier: 12-16 years old

allocated a mentor to prepare him or her for adult life. For a girl, these instructions started from the day of her first menstruation up to the day she got married. At the time of the marriage, she had to be a virgin and usually around 20 years old with the young man sometimes being up to 30.²⁶ Older people stated that this traditional system is not in place anymore:

Young people today think that they know everything better. They think that they are able to grow up all-alone without any guidance of the older generation. They do not want to hear our advice. They lack respect, contradict older people openly, drink and smoke and start sexual relationships far too early.²⁷

Rising school enrolment rates generally lead to the prolongation of adolescence: the longer teenagers stay at school, the longer they are in this hovering state between childhood and adulthood with all the chances and risks that this period of transition carries. The societies of the industrialised world underwent the same transformation over hundred years earlier after the implementation of universal primary school education during the 19th century.

Young people themselves do not perceive their situation as too problematic, they assemble a conglomerate of rules, ideas, knowledge and experiences and look for a coherent path through a labyrinth of contradictions. Their ideas of adulthood are straightforward: marrying and having children, earning money, improving their livelihood and being a respected member of society.

Gender relationships, love and sex

Around here there is only football, drink and sex. When it is dark there is only drink and sex. And when the drink runs out, there is sex.²⁸

According to a national survey from 2001, in Mozambique girls have their first sexual contacts on average at the age of 15.9 and boys at 15.6 years. The large majority of those experiences are pre-marital. Only between six and seven percent of young people used condoms at the first sexual intercourse²⁹. The fieldwork reflects those results: A majority of boys and girls stated having their first sexual experience at around 13-15 years. Most of them had some information about HIV/AIDS but normally did not use condoms. However, there is a significant group of girls and also boys who do not get sexually involved before 18 years old for religious or traditional reasons or because they fear to get pregnant.

Undesired pregnancy is one of the biggest problems for young women in Mozambique. They are often younger than 14 years when giving birth. Many girls are afraid to get pregnant. On one hand they have insufficient information about contraception and HIV/AIDS prevention and on the other hand they usually do not have the status and power to demand the use of a condom³⁰. The consequences for the girls and their families are severe: The girls are frequently incapable of assuming the responsibility of raising a child and pass it on to their mothers and grandmothers who have to carry the additional burden of caring for an undesired child. As hospitals in rural areas do not perform abortions, young women might risk traditional abortions or give birth alone in the bush and leave the newborn behind.

²⁶ This concerns Shangaan people in Southern Mozambique

²⁷ Chairman of a *Makwaya* Group, City of Chókwe, 24 Aug. 2006

²⁸ Statement of a young man from a rural area, Ivory Coast in Forman M. (ed). 1999. *AIDS and Men: Taking Risks or Taking Responsibility?*, Panos/Zed Books, London, 1999, p128

²⁹ INJAD. 2001. *Survey of Youth and Adolescent Reproductive Health and Sexual Behaviour in Mozambique* (English summary), National Institute of Statistics Mozambique/U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, available: <<http://big.berkeley.edu>>

³⁰ Interview with a young mother: A neighbour seduced her when she was 13 years old. She was not aware that she could get pregnant from having sex with him. Today the child's father completely ignores her and her daughter and never paid anything. Espungabera, 5 Oct. 2006

Many girls talked openly about the harassments they suffer from neighbours, classmates, even teachers.³¹ Although sexual violence seems very common, rape and sexual abuse are rarely reported to the police, be it that the girl or her parents do not know that they could report such incidents or that the girl does not tell anyone because she fears that her environment will play it down and blame her.

Many young people seem to lack basic information about sexuality and have no consciousness or knowledge about their own protection against HIV/AIDS. The prevention campaigns in rural areas are too few and the population in the three districts has no access to regular HIV/AIDS-information services.³² Moreover, a large part of HIV/AIDS-prevention in the country relies on unpaid and badly trained young activists. Information about HIV/AIDS usually reaches children at school and does rarely target youth out of school although they are most vulnerable.

The interviews revealed problematic experiences young people seem to have with (love)-relationships: 'Love does not exist here. You cannot trust in relationships. Nobody is really serious about love.'³³ 'Everyone seems to betray everyone. Nobody can be trusted. Among adults, it is the same thing. This is really difficult. It is a problem of the whole society.'³⁴ Girls blame boys for not being faithful and adult men for just using them. Boys blame girls for not being faithful either and just running after men who have money. Young men often openly admit that they have more than one partner. Then again, it is a common strategy for young women to secure their livelihoods by having sex with older men and consciously risk undesired pregnancies and infection with STDs or HIV/AIDS.³⁵

Education and employment

Despite continuous investments in the area of education, the quality and infrastructure of education remains critical: Many villages have inadequate school buildings and the number of students per class is usually extremely high (60 to over 100 pupils per class). In all three districts, a majority of pupils drop out of school before even starting sixth class.³⁶ The INJAD survey reports that 45 percent of female and 21 percent of male youth in rural areas have never attended school and only 30 percent of girls and 43 percent of boys between 15 and 24 years are at school.³⁷ Facit: a majority of teenagers are not attending school.

If a young man or woman finishes school, they have no chance to get professional training as colleges or universities are too few.³⁸ With much luck some young men do an apprenticeship with a local craftsman, most will never get such opportunities. Clearly unemployment is a huge problem for youth in all three districts. Official youth unemployment rates in Mozambique are not available. A survey from Zambia (2001) reports that over 73 percent of young people indicated that they were doing 'nothing'.³⁹

³¹ Xilembene (Chókwe), 15 Aug. 2006 / Macarretane (Chókwe), 21 Aug. 2006: Interviews with schoolgirls (14-17 years): They testified that sexual harassment and abuse, even rape are common in the village and at school. Girls in the other districts reported similar problems.

³² Young activists were supposed to run newly equipped HIV/AIDS-information centres in Chókwe and Mossurize. They were too few, not paid and felt insecure and unable. In 2006 both centres were closed.

³³ Interview, Nangade, 16 July 2006

³⁴ Interview, Espungabera, 2 Oct. 2006

³⁵ See Hawkins, K. & Mussa, F. & Abuxahama, S. 2005. *Milking the Cow: Young women's constructions of identity, gender, power and risk in transactional and cross-generational sexual relationships*, Options Consultancy Services and Populations Services International (PSI), Maputo

³⁶ Ministério da Educação e Cultura de Moçambique: *Distribution of pupils 2005*, available: <<http://www.mec.gov.mz/dep.php?p=98>>

³⁷ INJAD. 2001. *Survey of Youth and Adolescent Reproductive Health and Sexual Behaviour in Mozambique* (English Summary), National Institute of Statistics Mozambique/U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, available: <<http://big.berkeley.edu>>

³⁸ The province of Cabo Delgado (ca. 1.6 million inhabitants, census 2007) has one college for technical professions and a small private university.

³⁹ Chigunta, F. 2002. *The socio-economic situation of Youth in Africa: Problems. Prospects and Options*, p. 11

People end up surviving by cultivating fields and doing occasional jobs. To earn the urgently needed cash young men and women often engage in dangerous and dodgy activities like cross-border trading, smuggling, prostitution, theft, etc. Many young people are forced to ensure their own livelihood very early. More than half of our interviewees below the age of 18 years were living with only one parent or alone⁴⁰ and the number of minors who will be forced to provide the means for their own survival is bound to increase due to the high HIV/AIDS-prevalence⁴¹.

Conclusions

Youth in rural Mozambique face very harsh living situations and difficult prospects for the future. This generation is more in touch with the modern world outside their village than their parents and grandparents. They find themselves living in communities that are about to lose a big part of their traditions and customs. Young people are mirroring transformations and imbalances around them. The social and cultural characteristic of their generation assembles whatever they need, a mix of traditional, modern, local or global cultural aspects. I see their engagement and participation, their curiosity for new trends and information as rather positive. It shows that they want to get actively involved and take on the challenges of their lives.

It is assistance and dialogue that young people missed very much, an open dialogue about future prospects, identity, conflicts, relationships, gender norms, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Maybe even more importantly, they wanted something to do. Like youth in other parts of the world, they are impressed and influenced by global trends. But the 'modern' world they are introduced to by media images and other sources has nothing to do with their every day life and they will usually never get the chance to be part of it: In sight of a fast developing world, they are sitting around 'doing nothing'.

Adults lose influence over young people. More than that, due to a number of social and political transformations during the last decades the attitude of many adults towards their own culture and values changes as well. This produces insecurity and tensions in the communities. In particular the lack of trust in relationships that young people expressed in interviews is a frightening verdict for a society. On the other hand young people's need for advice and dialogue is imperative and often unfulfilled. Institutional support for youth is rare and schools are simply not able to provide any extra services.

Today, young people, just like adults, struggle to have money. Having or not having is of ultimate importance. But young people in the countryside are disadvantaged in terms of access to education and employment. The unemployment and underemployment of young people in the entire country increases a feeling of uselessness and powerlessness. Without money nor job, trust or social support many young people suffer from a considerable amount of emptiness, frustration and anger. They lose respect for their own and other people's lives and have no motivation to invest into the future.

Young people are most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Mozambique. The usual HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns do not provide the in-depth information and space to start the necessary dialogue with young people around HIV/AIDS. The traditional instructions of young people during adolescence introduce sexuality and gender relationships linked to social life, culture, spirituality and health. These systems lose importance and the conventional modern information about sexuality and HIV/AIDS taught at schools and elsewhere, are unfortunately very superficial and general. Like every other teenager in the

⁴⁰ Parents separated, migration, death of one or both parents, extreme poverty of parents, and family conflicts.

⁴¹ Estimates 2005: 16 percent of the adult population in Mozambique is HIV positive: WHO. 2006. *Epidemiological Fact Sheets: Mozambique*, update Aug. 2006

world, the worries and problems of young Mozambicans around relationships and sexuality are individual and far greater in every sense.

Mozambique has a considerable variety of traditional cultures. Dancing and music are definitely popular and a lot of young people express the desire to learn more and cultural activities and groups actually have a lot to offer in terms of quality, self-organisation, self-esteem and creativity⁴². But in many parts of the country traditional culture is in great danger today because most of the knowledge and skills lies with the generation of the 40-60 years olds. Many schools offer dance as an extra-curricular activity, but missing skilled leaders, these groups lack quality and continuity. Government programs and development organisations increasingly use dance and theatre to promote the prevention of HIV/AIDS or other development targets. The groups that are formed for such purposes have to fulfil the tasks of a program and cannot freely act out their creativity.

Many young people do express a strong sense of belonging and respect for their origins and would be excited to get involved but they have little opportunity to do so. Consequently they lack basic skills and knowledge of traditional art forms, which limits their abilities to create, interpret and experiment and develop their own cultural expression. This regression of cultural knowledge gives reason for serious concerns about the future of the intangible cultural heritage of Mozambique.

Culture offers opportunities

The discovery of creative power and activity in a group definitely help to develop the personality of the young person and his or her social skills. Culture offers a place to work out disparities creatively; it helps to integrate changes, to foster the dialogue between different strains and models. Artistic activities give some sense of fulfilment and competence, which could help to alleviate some of the emptiness and boredom of youth, strengthen their self-esteem and form a basis upon which to build new identities⁴³. Moreover, culture helps the development of civil society by providing an important space to freely express alternative voices.

Traditional groups and artists usually demonstrate a high level of self-organisation and self-reliance but they need support for larger projects like local festivals and space for creative activities, meeting people, getting information and advice. Such exchange celebrates the enjoyment of culture in the whole community. The public attention boosts the motivation of the groups and also attract new members.

The urgent protection and preservation of traditional culture done in an integrative way, relying on the expertise and engagement of local communities and groups, can become a strong means of empowerment of rural youth. The UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage provides the perfect basis here recommending to 'ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage and to involve them actively in its management'⁴⁴.

The discovery of creativity and the arts should be reinforced at school. Teacher training in Mozambique tries to equip teachers with basic skills in singing, music, dancing as well as drawing and handicrafts. But most of them will not have enough practise and knowledge to feel secure to teach the arts. In actual fact it would be more efficient to rely on a pool of local artists for arts education in each district. This would also demonstrate the appreciation of

⁴² Holzhausen, B. 2005. *Traditional Dance in Transformation: Opportunities for Development in Mozambique*, MA Dissertation, University of Leeds, available: <<http://www.nestcepas.ch/aktuell>>

⁴³ Matarasso, F. 1997. *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*, Comedia, London

⁴⁴ UNESCO. 2003. *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*, Paris, Oct. 2003, pp. 1-14

public bodies for local culture and increase the value of the arts as an income-generating activity.

These are just some basic thoughts on where and how young people could be encouraged to use their creative power. Undeniably the results and reflections of this study are very broad and touch various areas. Youth empowerment through creative work and the strengthening of local cultures could bring about positive and sustainable changes in HIV/AIDS prevention, gender equity, self-employment of youth and community development.

I believe that it is definitely very important to invest more effort and money into ameliorating the situation of rural youth in Mozambique. In order to conceive detailed programs adapted to the regional situation, it would clearly need more research and information.

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