

Generation of Change: Young People and Culture



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The State of the World Population 2008 Youth Supplement

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This is the third edition of the *Youth Supplement to UNFPA's State of the World Population Report*. The 2008 Report focuses on the interactions among culture, gender, and human rights and the critical importance of culturally sensitive approaches for effective development policies and programmes. The Youth Supplement addresses culture as it shapes and nurtures the lives of young people and shows how young people develop their own subcultures, which are often different from and may conflict with the dominant culture. The *Supplement* points out the value to young people of protecting the culture in which they grew up, but it speaks on behalf of their right to embrace their own cultures in their own ways.

Young people's cultural experience is layered like an onion, each layer revealing different aspects. As young people become adults and move out of their parents' orbit, they can become agents of positive change: they have the dynamism and flexibility, but also the perseverance required to make change from within. Development programmes should help them make the most of their opportunities. *The Youth Supplement* demonstrates through young people's own

stories how they influence change within their own cultures, championing human rights, gender equality and development.

The Supplement profiles the lives of young women and men from seven countries. They promote gender sensitivity in religious institutions (Colombia), oppose traditional harmful practices such as child marriage (Ethiopia); adapt international modern music to their own societies and use it to call for healthy behaviours (Vietnam); challenge gender stereotypes in sports (Mozambique); promote peace in place of political and armed violence (Occupied Palestinian Territory); use information and communication technologies to promote development (Mongolia), and encourage youth participation in government, even taking high office (Spain).

The State of World Population Report 2008 says it is crucial to incorporate culture into development policy and programming, especially in sensitive areas like sexual and reproductive health. The Report points out that bringing a cultural lens to bear on human rights helps all levels of society and all communities and groups to make human rights principles their own, making them part of their value system.

Human rights belong to everyone in every country: but they will become universal in practice only when individuals and communities find ways to articulate human rights in terms of their own cultures. The Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development emerged from local and personal experience. They will be fully achieved when their human rights basis is well integrated locally and when change comes from within the communities themselves. The *Youth Supplement of the State of the World Population Report* illustrates how that process can work for young people today.

About Culture: The *State of World Population Report 2008: Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights* says that “culture” means “inherited patterns of shared meanings and common understandings”. Culture influences how people manage their lives, and provides a lens through which they interpret their society.

Cultures are neither homogeneous nor static. Within each culture, there are groups of people with distinctive sets of behaviours and beliefs that set them apart from the larger culture. A subculture may be defined by the age of its members; by race, ethnicity, class or gender; by religious or political beliefs, or by profession. Individuals and groups within a culture also contest and change cultural values or practices that inflict harm or infringe human rights. Culture is a dynamic construct made by people themselves: people can bring about change that allows the articulation and realization of community values and practices in line with individual human rights.

Cultures are dynamic: they do not stand still. Global, regional and national factors make an impact on economies, societies, and environments. Cultures respond by accepting or rejecting new ways of thinking

and doing – or by finding a middle way if that is possible – and adjusting values and behaviours to deal with them.

The Young Generation and Cultural Change: As they grow through adolescence, young people develop their identity and become autonomous individuals. At the same time they acquire responsibilities and become part of their society.

Young people do not share their elders’ experiences and memories. They develop their own ways of perceiving, appreciating, classifying and distinguishing issues, and the codes, symbols and language in which to express them.

Young people’s responses to the changing world, and their unique ways of explaining and communicating their experience, can help transform their cultures and ready their societies to meet new challenges.

Many factors influence cultural change: new information and communication technologies; levels of health, education, nutrition and employment; economic progress or stagnation; political stability or violence, greater or less poverty. Young people live cultural change with more intensity than their elders,

and their influence on culture is more visible than on the economy or politics¹. Their dynamism can change some of the archaic and harmful aspects of their cultures that older generations take to be immutable.

Young people are as diverse as their societies. Different social, economic, residential, marital, ethnic, and religious backgrounds give each individual his or her own cultural ethos. The key to success in enabling young people to promote change is to accept their cultural framework and work in partnership with them.

This is especially important for marginalized groups, such as very young adolescent girls in societies where harmful traditions survive. Culturally-sensitive approaches to promote human rights can end practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting. They can remove impediments to age-appropriate information and services for sexual and reproductive health, and help to end violence and discrimination.

The Changing Cultural Context:

There are more than 1.5 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, the largest generation in human history. Approximately

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70 per cent live in developing countries, 60 per cent in Asia alone². They enter adulthood in a time of transformations in the economy, education, communication, demographics, the environment, technologies and culture.

Globalization is this generation's hallmark, with free flow of markets, capital and products; easier travel, instant connections, and rapid urbanization, with more than half of world population living in cities and towns. The result is economic and cultural integration on a scale never before seen, with a tremendous impact on every aspect of life.

This generation of young people is also shaped by a trend towards democracy and the rise of civil society, giving them much more opportunity to participate in local and national decision-making.

Young people, especially girls, are more likely to be healthy and educated than previous generations; except that they – especially adolescent girls and young women – have been disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.³

Globalization is producing a global youth culture. Urban landscapes in developed and developing countries alike feature many of

the same shopping malls, fast food chains, clothing stores, music clubs, and reality TV shows. Mass media shapes young people's tastes and trends. Music Television International (MTV), for example, which has a presence in most countries of the world, transmits not only music but aspirations, codes, values, behaviours and tastes. Internet cafes have become meeting places, especially for young men. Cellular phones are found everywhere in urban centres, and as a communal service in villages and poor communities.

Rural areas have less access to the global youth culture: though mobile phones and the Internet are spreading, information, ideas and popular culture still travel largely through radio and sometimes TV.

Globalization and the global culture have made everyone aware of consumption possibilities, including the people least able to satisfy them; for example only 1 per cent of young people in Ethiopia have access to the Internet, compared to 50 per cent in China. This sense of exclusion and frustration can turn into crime, violence and civil unrest. The young dream of a life that seems out of reach amid poverty, war, or political violence.

Interactions between traditional and global codes and values: Young people are absorbing new ideas, values, beliefs and codes through the connected world, mass media and new information technologies; but they are also growing up with the traditional cultural values of their own societies. This blending of local and globalized cultures may become more like a collision, with accompanying tensions and challenges.

Exposure to new information has both positive and negative sides. With very little opportunity to find out about sexual and reproductive health through their families or at school, for example, young people get information through the Internet, often from their peers. Although this is better than no information at all, young people may come to believe rumours, myths or “urban legends”. Some people feel that unfiltered information acquired from the Internet leads to conflict with traditional values.

The tension between local and globalized values is clearer in regard to sexual and reproductive health than with many other social issues. But despite the global media's impulse to uniformity, there are still wide differences among regions and countries in patterns of

marriage, sexuality and reproduction⁴. Local values are still the determinants of attitudes and practice.

Programmes for a Generation of

Change: Programmes for promoting young people's human rights need a cultural lens to ensure their effectiveness. They should encourage young people to consider their own behaviour in the light of their own cultures. Programmes should address questions such as young people's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as part of a continuous dialogue with older generations and existing cultural institutions, with the clear goal of promoting human rights, and without condoning harmful and oppressive practices.

Programmes working with young people can help find a balance between the two cultural worlds and remove obstacles to young people's health and wellbeing. Given the opportunity, young people can be highly effective as builders of peace, as participants in civil society; as bearers of new ideas, and as mediators between cultural tradition and cultural change.



Grita

MOZAMBICAN FOOTBALL PLAYER
PLAYING HARD, FOR LIFE

It was so hard to separate her from her twin brother. Grita and Elias were always together; they played together and fought together. When her brother started playing football Grita tagged along, barefoot, running after the ball down the dirt road. The boys in her neighbourhood – Alto Mãe, in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique – sometimes made fun of her. “The tomboy has come out to play,” they would say. “Go home and cook, little man.” But, in the end, they had to let her play because Grita’s brothers were the ones who owned the ball.

The owner of the ball always plays. Even if he plays badly, he plays. That’s the way it is. So I took advantage of the situation.

Grita played well; she had skill and drive. She liked football, but she also liked dolls. At school, though, she didn’t do as well, and her parents scolded her. Grita was born in Maputo in 1987, the fourth of five sons and

daughters of a couple from the north of the country. They struggled, but they were able to raise their kids in the midst of a civil war. Every day, her mother went out to sell “bulk clothes”: she bought big bundles of used clothing imported from rich countries, sorted it, folded it and sold it piece by piece in the market. Her mother sold a lot of clothes like this until she got sick and had to quit; her father, meanwhile, had a job at the Agricultural Ministry.

Even the neighbours call my dad Machel...

Samora Machel was the first leader of FRELIMO, the guerrilla movement that drove the Portuguese out of Mozambique: a man with a reputation for inflexibility.

...because he is very serious and demanding. But if he weren’t, God only knows where I would be today.

Why?

Because my neighbourhood is very tough. A lot of bad stuff goes down here.

It took Grita a while to figure that out, though. When she was little, she says, she played, went to school, and everything seemed peaceful. But when she became a teenager, she realized what she and her friends didn’t have and how hard it was going to be to get it.

We want lots of things. The guys want money to invite girls out. They see a car they like, a phone, and they don’t have it, so some of them start stealing. And we girls see shoes, hair extensions, a dress... you see them and you can’t buy them, so many decide to sell their bodies to get them. In my neighbourhood that’s very common.

Did any of your neighbours suggest that you do that?

A woman never says to another woman “Let’s sell our bodies.” Women don’t talk

about these things. They do things that get your attention and, if you aren't very determined, you'll end up doing what they do. It's men who say to other men, "Let's get together and steal" or whatever.

Were you ever tempted?

We all suffer from temptation. But no, not really.

I want to [play football], because I like it. But also to show that women can do what men do, that we are equal to them. But for that to happen, women need better conditions.

How were you able to avoid it?

People were always talking to me about the rules, about proper conduct. My parents at home, the pastor at church... And the coach of my football team was also an educator, a sort of father. He told us to take care of ourselves, to resist the temptation to take the wrong path. And I always did what he said.

When Grita was 11, a young coach named Wali saw her playing football at

school and invited her to join his team. The Rock7 was the best women's football team in the city, and Grita was excited. Her teammates were ten years older than her, but they accepted her affectionately: she was the baby of the Rock7.

Her father, though, objected: he said that a girl shouldn't do this sort of thing. Her mother, on the other hand, thought that if Grita was into football, she wouldn't be tempted by worse things. She supported her from the beginning and managed to get her father's permission to play on the team. Three times a week, the coach called at her house and they walked five kilometres to the football field. And on Sundays there were games, the highlight of the week. Grita would put on her green-and-white jersey with the drawing from the campaign to use condoms: for the past several years, the Rock7 have had the support of the *Associação Moçambicana para Desenvolvimento da Família* and the *Coalizão Nacional de Organizações de Mulheres*, to spread information about HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, and gender questions. At half time, the players often sit down and talk to the other team or the spectators about these issues. They do this in other places as well: schools, houses, city parks.

We are not just football players. We are also activists. At first they didn't take us very

seriously, but now they have to because we have shown them that we do what we do well. So they have to listen to us.

In 1999, when she joined the team, Grita won her first championship. Even today, after so many triumphs, that championship game, which the Rock7 won 1–0, is the one she remembers most. Until then, she was afraid to go out on the field, afraid to make mistakes. From that day on, though, she knew that she was good and that she wanted to take football seriously.

Why did you want to play a sport dominated by men?

First off, because I want to, because I like it. But also to show that women can do what men do, that we are equal to them. But for that to happen, women need better conditions. For instance, the FIFA often sends money for women's football, but the Mozambique League uses it for the men.

Today Grita is the captain of her team. She can play many different positions: defence, midfield or offence. Sometimes, in the middle of a game, her coach puts her in another position to confuse the other team. Grita is not tall but she is very athletic.

She runs fast, controls the ball well and kicks with both feet.

We show everybody that women can play too, just like men.

Is there a feminine way to play football?

No, it's the same. When we play, people think that it is men playing. But the people who think that because we play football we are less feminine, or that we are tomboys, they just don't know what they are talking about. We are women. We have women's bodies. We have hips, we have breasts, we are real women.

On the Rock7 there are women between the ages of 15 and 28. Some are high school students, others are mothers with children.

Do you hit players on the other team?

If necessary... But you have to know how to hit, so they don't see you and call a foul. It's just part of the game. Hitting is also part of life. And when it comes to hitting, you can't hit gently. You have to mean it.

It's Sunday afternoon. The Rock7 are playing on a crushed stone field in a poor



section of Maputo. Their play is well organized, guided by clear ideas. The coach, standing on the touchline, shouts more and more instructions. In the stands there are one or two hundred people – mostly boys – who chat, yell, dance.

Doesn't it bother you that the coach of your women's team is a man?

That's how it is. They say that men are better at instructing women. Women often lose their way because of men. Anyway, these are men and they show us the good things in life.

And don't you think that women should coach too?

I do, but women are not taken seriously. No one thinks that women are capable of doing anything; they don't trust them. In our team, we have an old joke: "Women don't think, they remember." We players have shown that we have the ability; they just don't take us seriously.

In 2004, Grita made it into the national team and now she is one of its stars. Her team-mates have included Maria Mutola, the great Mozambican athlete and Olympic champion in the 800 metres, who later gave

up football to work full-time at track & field. At first, these international competitions were a major responsibility:

I felt that I was responsible for my flag, for my whole country. I was moved when I heard the national anthem. But now I play for the sake of the game. I mean, even the League's heads don't take it that seriously. Before, they would promise you some money – one hundred dollars, say – and they would give it to you. Now they promise you one hundred and they give you sixty. And if you ask them what happened, they say you are undisciplined. That's sad. If they don't give you the money, it ends up in

someone's pocket, and I don't want to play for them to make money. They are afraid of men, but they think that a woman will be passive and won't say anything... They are starting to realize how wrong they are.

Thanks to the national team, Grita has visited places she never would have imagined: Zambia, Algeria, France. But she doesn't have a salary, a steady income. She still lives at home with her father, and her boyfriend has to treat her when they go out. For five years, Grita has been dating a student at the police academy. She says she wants to marry him – “He is a godsend, he's perfect for me” – but not yet.

I still have a lot I want to do. I want to study medicine, build a life for myself. I don't want to get married before finishing my studies.

Next year, Grita will try to get into medical school, and she is convinced she can. For now, though, football is still the most important thing in her life: this match, this Sunday, now coming to an end. The Rock7 won by a huge difference, she scored six or seven goals, and the night is falling over Maputo with a burst of colour on the horizon. The girls are changing in the stands. They put on their women's clothes, they take care of their make-up. Wali and his assistant give them a sandwich and fifteen *meticais* – about sixty cents – to pay for the bus ride home. Grita looks tired and quite happy.

Football is great and I don't want to stop playing, but what matters to me most is studying. I have to do something with my life. I want to get married — of course I do — but if my husband leaves me one day I don't want to be left with nothing. That's why I can't get married until I have studied. I want to have something all my own, to have a life of my own.



USING SPORT TO CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES

Sport is part of young people's lives, yet many cultures still prevent girls and young women from getting involved. Grita's story shows how determined and persistent young women can challenge even football's male-dominated culture. As a result of their drive, more and more girls and young women are playing the game.

Sport has begun to appear on the agenda of many countries and international bodies.¹ Regularly engaging in sports promotes physical fitness, builds self-esteem and confidence and reduces stress and depression.² With its universal values of fitness, fair play, teamwork and the pursuit of excellence, sport can improve the lives of individuals and communities. Sport can also create safe spaces, especially for girls.

Sport can give young people the sense that they are part of a community beyond their families and help them connect with their peers and with adults. Sport can expose young people to new ideas and opportunities, and provide access to resources, opportunities and aspirations on their road to adulthood.

Sport and physical activity were first recognized as a human right in UNESCO's 1978 International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, a concept supported by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. In 2004 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 58/5³

which invited Governments, the United Nations, the specialized agencies, where appropriate, and sport-related institutions to work collectively so that sport and physical education could present opportunities for solidarity and cooperation in order to promote a culture of peace and social and gender equality, and to advocate dialogue and harmony. The General Assembly proclaimed the year 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. The Year aimed to facilitate knowledge sharing, raise awareness and create the right conditions for sport-based human development programmes.

Even though boys and girls have equal rights to its benefits, sport is still dominated by young men.⁴ For instance in Peru 46 per cent and in Bangladesh 47 per cent of males 18-34 are engaged in sports or recreational activities, compared with only 28 and 14 per cent of women in the same age group.⁵

In Nairobi, Kenya, the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) is a large-scale, community-based, mixed-sex organisation in one of the city's largest and poorest slums. For over two decades MYSA has found new ways to promote sports, environmental improvement and community development, and to convey information about sexual and reproductive health. In lieu of fees, members participate in regular clean-up projects in the places where they live. MYSA's girls' pro-

gramme addresses traditional gender stereotypes and promotes positive interactions between boys and girls. Before each game, players and supporters hear talks about HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, and other reproductive health issues.

MYSA builds self-esteem and directs the skills of young people into improving themselves and their communities. Its programmes have changed the lives of thousands of boys and girls. Young people who have been involved in MYSA have become youth leaders and role models for others. Some have gone on to professional sports, graduated from universities, and become local leaders.⁶

Girls and women getting into sport open up restrictive gender stereotypes, but sport also gives girls access to the public sphere. It provides avenues to information and learning, and to new and valuable life skills. It allows girls to form friendships and expand their social networks, and to enjoy freedom of expression and movement. Through sport girls may benefit from mentoring by trusted adults. Confronted with girls in a new role, boys learn about their strengths, capabilities and contributions, which may help reshape their thinking about what girls should and shouldn't do.⁷ Sport may help transform the ways girls see themselves and how their families, peers and communities see them.



Daniel

COLOMBIAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZER
A SAFE SPACE IN A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

There are deaths. All through his life, there have been deaths. The first was before he was even one month old: only much later would he learn that his father had been murdered by a paramilitary group.

I never had a father, but not until I was around eighteen years old did I ask why. Before that, I didn't want to know, and no one told me anything.

When he did ask, Daniel learned that his father had been killed by *Las Rayas*, “A ‘clean-up’ group that murdered thieves, drug addicts”. He was also told that his father “stole, but only from people who had something to steal” and that he was trying to leave all that behind him. “He wanted to change but his past was unforgiving”: the paramilitaries kidnapped him, tortured him for several days and left him dead in an empty lot near his house.

Daniel was born in 1981, in a poor neighbourhood in Barrancabermeja, a city of 300,000 in Magdalena, one of the most

violent areas of Colombia. When Daniel was five, his mother, a domestic worker overwhelmed by caring for seven children, brought him to his paternal grandmother. From then on, Daniel lived with her, an aunt and a cousin.

His grandmother bought him his first football: Daniel was so happy. He liked school and it wasn't particularly hard for him. But what he really loved was football. Daniel spent his afternoons at the field, playing with friends, chatting, fooling around: learning how to be a boy from the neighbourhood. From time to time, his grandmother would take him to church, but Daniel did not pay much attention.

Barrancabermeja is the centre of Colombia's oil region; it is a city with a longstanding tradition of labour struggles and violence. In the nineties, an armed Marxist group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), dominated the region and the city. The guerrillas would kill a thief or an addict from time to time “to set an

example.” Daniel grew up knowing that it was better not to get involved – but that wasn't always easy. When he was thirteen, an ELN group showed up one afternoon at the corner where his friend Alejandro, who was seventeen, was playing cards with some other kids.

The guys took out their guns and forced him to kneel. They made him apologize for having had something with the girlfriend of one of them. And they killed him right there, kneeling. They shot him in the head in front of all his friends. Out of envy, out of jealousy, they killed him. That doesn't justify a death.

And people in the neighbourhood knew who the killers were?

Yes, because in trying to find Alejandro they had asked around where he lived, so many people saw them. But we lived in fear of retaliation.

Soon, it was his grandmother's turn to die. Daniel went through a very dark phase. School wasn't going so well and he didn't know what to do with his life. The only thing he was certain about was football: Daniel kept improving and, at the age of sixteen, he made the Barrancabermeja team. He imagined himself becoming a real football player, one of the guys he saw on television. But then he injured his ankle, and all his athletic dreams came to an end.

The Church does not want to encourage young people to be sexually active. But it does want everyone to take care of his or her body, which is the temple of the spirits

In 1999, when Daniel was about to finish high school, paramilitary groups allied with drug dealers tried to take Barrancabermeja. There were street battles on and off for almost four years. By then, Barrancabermeja was the most violent city in Colombia: an average of 350 homicides for every 100,000 inhabitants, every year. Meanwhile, the guerrillas kept recruiting.

During his last year of school, the ELN approached Daniel and several classmates.

We were eighteen. We were finishing high school and didn't know exactly what to do next. The guerrillas take advantage of that. There are lots of young people who can't afford to keep studying, so they go up to them and say "Look, I can give you some money and other stuff if you work for us." They told us, "If you want a bike, if you want money to go out, to buy clothes, come work with us." A friend told me that he got 500,000 pesos for one round, which means stay posted to see if the military or paramilitary is coming. Or for performing a single task, like taking something (a message, weapons) to the commander of other sector. We were young and didn't have anything to do or any vision of the future. At home no one paid much attention, and they took advantage of that too.

In Barrancabermeja, half of all young people are unemployed: violence was one of the few ways out.

Didn't they talk to you about politics?

Not a lot. Sometimes they told us about their ideology and tried to sell it to us. They said you must fight for the people, all that stuff, but we had other interests.

You were never tempted to join?

Of course I was tempted because I didn't have other economic resources. But there were people – friends, family, Father Juan José – who influenced me in the other direction. They said that was not the way to get ahead, that I would end up killed.

Daniel got closer to a youth group at his neighbourhood parish. His first contact was through his girlfriend, a Catholic girl who convinced him to start going to mass and participating in some Christmas activities. But he really got interested when they asked him to organize a football tournament for kids. There, for the first time, he felt useful, respected. His mentor Father Juan José convinced him that he had to find a way to help others: the first thing that occurred to him was becoming a doctor. But he couldn't, he would never have enough money. Then he thought he could become a priest and took a course to find out if he had the vocation: he decided against it.

After high school Daniel spent a year not knowing what to do. He couldn't go to college and he couldn't find a job; he spent a lot of his time teaching catechism and working with youth. At the end of the year, he received a scholarship to study hygiene and industrial safety, but he couldn't afford it and had to



drop out. Later, he went to a two-year trade school, but he wasn't able to finish that either.

Meanwhile, he got more and more involved in the parish. He organized tournaments, clubs, dances and debates for kids from the neighbourhood: the idea was to make them feel that someone was paying attention to them and occupy their free time so they wouldn't get involved in drugs, crime or political violence. Father Juan José explained that there is no peace with exploitation or without dignity. Daniel was named youth representative for his sector to the *Equipo de Animación de la Pastoral*, a Church group involved in community work. "I was trusted with that post in a very short time," he says, with pride.

The battle for Barrancabermeja ended with the paramilitaries victorious. There was no more fighting in the street, but the new

bosses had their own ideas about how things should be done:

They thought they were our fathers. I don't know where they got the moral authority to pick up kids and make them "spin": run, jump, bend over until they threw up, to discipline them so they would not be on the street, take drugs, steal.

And if the kids didn't do what they were told, the paramilitaries would take their clothes or shave their heads and make them stand on a corner with a sign that said "I am a junkie". If a group suspected that someone was working with the opposition, they died. Daniel and his friends knew that they had to take care of themselves to survive. The Church is one of the few institutions the armed groups

tolerate: for a young person with social concerns, it is one of the few places to do some sort of social work and stay alive.

In 2003, the Ministry of Family Welfare, the Diocese of Barrancabermeja and the *Corporación Desarrollo y Paz* launched an educational campaign on sexual and reproductive health with support from the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA. Daniel was one of the people chosen to learn and, eventually, teach. Now he works on this project with kids from the ages of seven to sixteen. Daniel starts the sessions by asking the kids about school and their problems, and he helps them. Later, he talks to them about gender issues:

What does mommy do at home?

She cleans.

Do you help her clean?

No, because my dad says that's women's work.

Is that really women's work? Little girl, do you help clean?

Yes, I help my mom.

Does your brother help her?

No, because my dad says that that is women's work. Women are for the house, men for work.

Do you believe that?

The conversations get more complex and, generally go where Daniel wants them to: mainly, showing the kids that there are other views about men and women, and their obligations and rights.

Though it's complicated, this is, in a way, the easiest part. It is harder to explain to the kids how to take care of and respect their bodies, because the discussion always comes to the position of religion on sexual relations and contraceptives.

The Church does not want to encourage young people to be sexually active. But it does want everyone to take care of his or her body, which is the temple of the spirit. So we say that you as a person have desires, but you have to take care of yourself, love yourself, value yourself. If you are in a relationship and you think the time has come to have sexual relations – because there is love and commitment – then take care of yourself. And to do that, you have to know about contraceptives.

But aren't there people in the Church who get angry if you give out condoms, for example?

Well, we don't give out condoms.

But you recommend them.

Yes, we recommend them but we don't give them out. It's true that what we are saying is not in line with what the Church says. But we are very prudent. We are not encouraging the kids to have sex; we are, rather, suggesting that they have a responsible sexual behaviour.

You see the contradiction...

Yes, I do. But I also feel that we are doing something for the community, and this is the way we can do that.

This year, Daniel started an online university course studying ethnic education; he wants to dedicate his life to social work. For six years, he has been dating Diana Marcela, with whom he enjoys a responsible relationship. When she goes to the clinic for the contraceptive injections he goes with her, though he says everyone looks at him funny. Daniel says that as soon as possible he is

going to make a home and have children, and he will keep doing what he can for others. But death still lurks:

They have killed many and no one says anything. Now things look calm. They keep killing, but nothing comes of it. No police reports, nothing about it in the papers.

Are you frightened something like that could happen to you?

Yes, of course. It can happen at any time. You don't make a good impression on someone and that's it.

Don't you get discouraged?

Sometimes I do, because of these things or others. But then I go and talk with God; He encourages me in many ways, in His little things. He tells me to keep moving ahead.

What are 'His little things'?

This, for example. The fact that I am somewhere as important as this. That is because God wanted it to be, to show me that I am on the right path, that what I am doing matters. Those are His little things.

YOUNG PEOPLE, RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Religion is part of many young people's culture, contributing to their identities and helping them shape adult lives. Through religion, they form the beliefs, values and norms which help them find their way in the world.

Young people, especially in developing countries, seem to agree with their parents about religion. According to a "Wellbeing" study by MTV Networks International (MTVNI) in 2006, young people in the developing world are more religious than young people in the developed world.¹

More than half of 16-34 year old Indonesians, Brazilians and Indians said that they were religious, compared to one in four in the USA and one in 10 in Sweden and Germany. There was also a positive correlation between active involvement in religion and happiness levels. Even so, young people are less likely than their elders to participate in church organizations and charities.²

Religious institutions help development by fighting poverty, providing safety nets for the outcast and the poor. Unintended pregnancies and unwanted children ensure that poverty endures from one generation to the next. Breaking this link means informing young people about their reproductive health and rights, allowing them to decide how many children to have, and when.

Many religious institutions find adolescent sexual and reproductive health too sensitive. Others, like the programme in Madgalena Medio, are more willing to help young people like Daniel find their way. These courageous institutions understand that giving young people the basis for informed decisions helps them plan for a better future. In the age of HIV/AIDS they realise that what they don't know could cost young people not only a better life, but life itself.

Partnerships with religious institutions and religious leaders also assist communities' development. For example, religious schools such as the Jesuit *Fé y Alegria* schools in Venezuela integrate community building, skills training, and leadership development into their programmes.³ In Ghana, a network of inter-faith organizations provides education and services to local communities, including raising awareness about preventing HIV and pregnancies among young people.⁴

Religious leaders can mobilize communities, help shape public opinion and denounce harmful practices. Religious leaders frequently contribute to efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation. The head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has thrown his support behind a national campaign to end child marriage.⁵

Given the importance of religion in young people's lives, development programmes must involve religious leaders, religious institutions and young people themselves to find common ground and promote change as partners. Development practitioners should enlist religious leaders' support to reach out to young people, address issues like gender-based violence, end harmful traditional practices, encourage male responsibility, and improve sexual and reproductive health information and services.



Tsehay

ETHIOPIAN DOMESTIC WORKER
FLEEING CHILD MARRIAGE

Her sister showed her the dress. White, long and shining, it was the prettiest dress Tsehay had ever seen. Tsehay was nine years old and this was going to be the first time she would wear new clothes; until then, she had always worn hand-me-downs from her older sisters.

For me? This dress is for me?

Yes, for your wedding this afternoon.

For my what?

Tsehay didn't understand a thing. She had heard about marriage because her four older sisters were married; she had been at the wedding parties of the two youngest – who said that they were very happy – but she never thought that something like this would happen to her so soon.

She was so startled that she didn't even think to ask who she was going to marry. Her sister told her anyway: a boy from the same town, though Tsehay didn't know him. She

did ask what it was like to be married. Her sister told her not to worry, everything would be all right. She would have to take care of her new house, her husband and her children. Tsehay thought that it must be difficult to have children. Then her sister explained that, since she was still so young, she would stay with her family until she came of age: in two years, when she turned eleven, her sister said, she would go live with her husband.

For Tsehay, the day went by in a cloud. Her sisters dressed her, her mother did her hair; they put perfume on her and, later, the town's elders came over with the groom and his family. The groom, Tsehay thought, seemed as nervous as she, but he was a big boy: he was at least fifteen. Tsehay was very frightened: she would never be able to live with this grown man. The boy tried to meet her eye, but Tsehay looked away. In fact, they never once spoke during the party, with all its food, drink and song. Bride and groom alike hid with their own families.

Night fell and Tsehay slept at home. The next morning, they dressed her again

for the party at the groom's house: another day of dancing and celebration. When it was all over, Tsehay went home with her parents and siblings. Everything seemed the same but it was so different: she was married.

Child marriage is traditional and common in Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa and one of the poorest. In the rural Northern provinces where Tsehay lives, nine out of ten marriages are arranged by parents, and almost half the girls are married before they are fifteen.

Tsehay was born in 1989, in a village of two hundred families with neither electricity nor running water. Her family was not among the poorest: they had a small piece of land for growing barley and wheat; two cows, two oxen and a three-room shack made out of branches, mud and manure.

Tsehay never went to school. There was none in her village and, besides, she was always too busy. For as long as she can remember she had to work at home or in the fields. Sometimes she had a little time to play

with other kids. She remembers that one day her mother told her to play carefully so that she didn't open up her wound. But, try as she might, she cannot remember anything else about her genital mutilation: she thinks that she was five or six at the time, but she is not sure. For Tsehay the moment of the circumcision, as they do to three out of four Ethiopian women, is a blank.

Two or three times a year, Tsehay would go to an Ethiopian Orthodox mass, otherwise, to her, usually one day was just like the next: cleaning, cooking, taking care of the animals, fetching water from the well. Tsehay didn't complain: she couldn't imagine a different life.

"...if I got married everything would change for the worse. So I decided to go to Addis."

Six months after her wedding, Tsehay saw her husband again, at church, because it was Epiphany. He tried to approach her, to talk to her, but she ran away: she was not the least bit interested. She was increasingly afraid of living with that man; he might make her do things against her will and force her to bear children and work for him and for them. But she couldn't think of a way out.

Months later, her father got sick: he felt weak and had a high fever. He went to a first aid centre at a nearby town, where a nurse gave him an injection and sent him home. That's where he died, soon thereafter, of malaria. Tsehay isn't sure how old he was, but she thinks her must have been about fifty.

The death of her father changed everything. Her mother was pregnant and there was no way to work their little plot. Over the course of just a few months, they had to sell their animals and some of their land. Tsehay grew desperate: the date when she would have to move in with her husband was drawing near. She didn't want to, but had no choice: if she refused, her husband's family could sue hers and demand money that they didn't have. It would ruin them for good. Tsehay thought that she had to do something.

I had heard talk of Addis Ababa, one of my relatives had told me about it. They told me that there people didn't have to work; if you went there, they would give you something to eat and take care of you. I wanted to be taken care of. I was a child, but I had never been able to be a child; no one had ever looked after me or taken care of me. And if I got married everything would change for the worse. So I decided to go to Addis, where they would take care of me.

Tsehay knew that the relative who had spoken to her of Addis – a 30-year-old man related to her father, a trader who often went to the capital – was about to travel. That afternoon, Tsehay took a 100-birr bill –about 10 US dollars– that her mother kept in a drawer and hid it in the fields. The next morning, she woke before dawn, got the bill and, without saying goodbye to anyone, went to the house of the relative who had spoken of Addis. Tsehay told him that she wanted him to take her there. The man said no. She told him if he didn't take her she would go alone; the man agreed.

Tsehay doesn't remember much about the trip. She knows that it took three days, that sometimes they had to walk and that they never reached Addis. The man took her to a town in the south, near Wellega, where he put her to work in the fields of some friend of his. This wasn't why Tsehay had left her town. Here she had to work endlessly, no one took care of her, and it wasn't even her hometown. After two weeks, Tsehay repeated her ultimatum: if you don't get me out of here, I will go alone. The man took her to the capital.

When they arrived, Addis seemed very big and noisy. But she didn't have a lot of time to look around: the next day, her relative got her a job as a domestic worker in the house of



another family he knew. Tsehay started to realize that her life in the capital would not be like she had imagined it.

Then I realized that he had tricked me. But I had to stay; there was no way out. I couldn't go home, nor could I do anything else.

The family lived in a modest house in the Merkato neighborhood, where Addis's central market is. In Ethiopia, poor families do as the rich ones do; they take on still poorer people who work for little more than a roof over their head and something to eat.

From then on, Tsehay has no real sense of time: it's as if nothing else important happened to her. Or very little. She remembers

the time she got fed up with her boss and went to work at another house, but she went back after a few months. Or the time that a neighbour who was a sex worker and had very nice clothes and good food suggested that Tsehay work with her. She thought about it, but decided not to:

I was afraid of catching HIV, and if I got sick I would never be able to have children or anything.

For eight years, all of Tsehay's days have been alike: she gets up at six in the morning, has a cup of tea and starts making the injera, the traditional Ethiopian bread. Her employers sell the bread she makes to

neighbours. At one o'clock, when she finishes cooking, she fetches water in a bucket, washes the cooking utensils and starts cleaning the house. When she finishes, around five o'clock, she starts cooking dinner for the family. At nine, her bosses sit down to eat; Tsehay eats what is left a little later alone in a corner, and then goes to sleep.

She says that they treat her well: they don't beat her or rape her, and they pay her a salary of 50 birr – about five US dollars – a month. Occasionally she goes to church or out for a walk. Until recently, she didn't know anyone, didn't have any friends. In the city full of people, Tsehay lived a more solitary life than she had in her town.

And can you bear this life?

Yes, I am fine, because I have a plan for the future.

Tsehay says that something changed when she started taking the informal educational classes offered through the *Biruh Tesfa* – Bright Future – project organized by the Ministry of Youth with the support of the Population Council and UNFPA. There she learned how to write her name and dial a phone number, and she is going to learn to

read. But, above all, she met other girls like her, girls who arrived to Addis escaping early marriage and poverty.

One classmate told me about Arab countries, like Qatar and Kuwait, where a girl can work and make more money, be independent. Then she introduced me to people who organize the trip for you. So I decided to do it. I used all the money I had saved up, about 600 birr, to get my passport to go. But things didn't turn out right.

In preparation for her trip, Tsehay had to get a medical examination, and they discovered she had a problem, "Some scar, I don't know what, something," with a lung. So they said that she had to recover before traveling, but she has not been able to get the necessary treatment because she had spent all her money.

The day they told me that I couldn't go was the saddest day of my life. I cried and cried, but then I thought that it would all work out, that one way or another I would be able to do it.

And which was your happiest day?

Tsehay thinks for a while. First she says that there was no happiest day, but then she says it was when she went back to her town.



I went back about three years ago because I found out that my brother had died. So I was able to see my mother. I didn't know whether she was dead or alive, and I was so happy to see her again, to embrace her.

You wouldn't like to go back for good?

Tsehay thinks again, and then says that she wouldn't. That there is nothing, there is no running water or electricity, and if she went back she would have to get married and have

children, and so all she would do would be to look after them, her home and husband:

If it cannot be helped, I will have to go back, but I hope not. If I went back to the town I wouldn't have a life of my own; everything would be for them. I could never buy a piece of clothing for myself. One day, I want to buy a piece of clothing for me.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS CHANGING HARMFUL TRADITIONS

Cultures have their own ways of marking the differences between boys and girls and what is expected of them. What all cultures have in common is that expectations change as children grow into adolescents. This is especially true for girls.

In cities, girls as well as boys tend to stay in school. They make a gradual transition to the responsibilities of adulthood. But in traditional and rural societies, puberty still marks the dividing line when most young girls leave school and start on the unsafe road of marriage and motherhood. Marriages are arranged by their elders, and young people, even boys, have little or no choice in the matter.

Tradition is losing its grip on girls, even very young ones like Tsehay. Some girls, like Tsehay, escape child marriage by leaving their villages. Those who stay will sometimes find support from programmes working against child marriage. These girls are asserting their right to decide for themselves whom and when to marry, even leaving home if they have to. Although they would not put it like that, they are claiming their adolescence, demanding enough time to equip themselves for adult life in the 21st century.

All countries – including Tsehay’s – agree that child marriage is an abuse of children’s human rights. Yet in the next ten years, a hundred million girl children will probably be married. In regional hot spots such as Tsehay’s Amhara

region in Ethiopia, as many as half the girls are married by the age of 15; in Bihar, India, 40 per cent; in Bangladesh more than a third, in Chad 29 per cent and in the Dominican Republic 11 per cent. There are about 51 million married adolescents in the world.¹

Once they are married, girls are usually not allowed to leave their homes, and are cut off from their birth family and friends. They have less access to modern media or other sources of information than unmarried girls. They have no power in their households and are barely involved in decisions to do with sexuality and reproduction. Their husbands are likely to be older and more sexually experienced, which exposes the girls to a higher risk of HIV infection, especially since sex is likely to be unprotected. They are expected to produce children as soon as possible and risk their lives in doing so: young adolescents’ risk of illness, injury or death as a result of pregnancy is much higher than for women over 18.

Several international human rights instruments protect children from child marriage. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). These instruments call for the free and full consent of parties to

marriage, minimum age of marriage set at 18 years old, inclusion of child marriage as a harmful practice and protection for the rights of children from all forms of exploitation.

Many programmes around the world are working to prevent child marriage. For example, the *Berhane Hewan* programme in Amhara, Ethiopia enrolls groups of girls at risk of child marriage. Female mentors promote functional literacy, life skills, livelihoods skills and reproductive health education. At monthly community conversations, parents and religious leaders discuss child marriage and issues that affect the girls’ wellbeing. When girls graduate from the programme their families are given a goat – the same present they would have received from the bridegroom’s family.

Community involvement is a major component of the programme and perhaps one of the keys to its success: 96 per cent of participants remain unmarried after two years in the programme. Similar results are seen in programmes in India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya and Burkina Faso.

Renewed and more intense efforts are needed to reach all adolescent girls at risk of child marriage while they are still at school. Working within cultures, and with the participation of families and local communities, the eradication of this timeworn practice will allow millions of girls to stay in school and enjoy a socially protected transition to adulthood.



Jiigee

MONGOLIAN SHEPHERD

A CELL PHONE AND A GOLD RUSH ON THE MONGOLIAN STEPPE
GLOBALIZATION MEETS LOCAL CULTURE

At first, he had trouble learning to ride. But by the time he was seven, Jiigee had figured out that the horse was more frightened than he was, and showed him who was boss. After all, a Mongolian boy must be a good rider. Especially a Mongolian shepherd boy on the steppe.

Jigjidsuren, known as Jiigee, was born in 1985 in a corner of the Bat-Ulzii district of Uvurkhangai province, central Mongolia. His parents were nomadic shepherds, so the exact place of his birth is not entirely clear, but it was not far from where he lives today: Mongolian shepherds no longer move long distances, only a few kilometres depending on the pastures and the seasons.

Jiigee has always lived among these gentle hills, green in the spring and white in the winter, where the temperature can get as high as 35°C in the summer and as low as -40°C in December; where the nearest neighbour lives kilometres away and weeks can go by without seeing a stranger; where life is lived much as it has been for centuries.

No, I didn't go to school. My father needed me here, working.

Mongolia's few illiterate children come from shepherd families who live far from a day school and who can't or don't want to go to boarding school. When Jiigee reached school age, his father was sick and he was needed to help take care of the flocks. So Jiigee's education was in herding.

The first thing I learned, when I was five or six, was how to tend sheep.

And what's the key?

The most important thing is to fatten them up. My father showed me the places where they eat best.

Jiigee says that a good shepherd has to know about diseases, which grasses are good for sheep and which are not. And how to protect the flock from cold, wolves and

thieves. There seem to be fewer wolves than before, he says and more thieves. He has often had to shoot at wolves, and a friend recently had around a third of his flock stolen. That didn't use to happen, Jiigee says.

Jiigee's father also taught him that the sheep must love and respect – not fear – their shepherd. When the sheep see him, Jiigee says, they come to him because they know he will take them to water and food. A dog is not always a good thing; they scare the sheep.

When he was eight, Jiigee was promoted to the next grade: cows are calmer and more serene, but his herd would sometimes mix with another and he had to recognize and separate his animals. The next year, he started looking after horses, which are faster and more restless, but also easier: they all follow the stallion who leads the herd.

And that was the last step?

No, then come the goats.

Not until the end? The goats are the hardest?

In the spring, when the kids are born, it gets tricky because sometimes goats don't take care of the kids, and we have to do it: we have to bring them to their mothers so that they eat and don't die on us.

And which animals do you prefer?

The goats and the sheep. They are the ones that need me most. I have to save the little ones, look after what they are eating, be careful when the wolves come. Sheep expect a lot of you, they ask for a great deal.

"If my daughter studies, she will be able to lead another life, an easier one. I have never been to the city, but friends have told me, and I have seen it on television: in cities, life is easier..."

When Jiigee was ten years old, his father died, and his older brother and mother took charge. His brother married and had two daughters; his mother moved to the town. Jiigee's life, meanwhile, went on as

it always had: he took care of the animals, saw his friends – the sons of neighbouring shepherds – and had a good time every once in a while at a party, a wedding or by travelling down to the town, twenty kilometres away.

When he was around eighteen, Jiigee's mother and brother said it was time he married and had his own family, his own *ger*, his own animals. Jiigee liked the idea of being independent but he is shy, and on the steppe it's not easy to meet girls. A friend tried to help him, his mother looked into it, but it didn't work out. Until a spring day over two years ago.

Jiigee was chasing stray horses, thirty or forty kilometres from home. He stopped to ask some shepherds if they had seen the horses. They said they hadn't; but in their *ger* Jiigee had seen a girl who caught his eye. And she looked back and smiled at him.

Marta was nineteen; a few days later, Jiigee saw her again, and then again and again. When the summer started, Jiigee invited all his friends and relatives to come with him, so that Marta's parents would see that he was worthy to be their son-in-law. Jiigee and Marta were married a month later, and very soon she got pregnant.

Your life has changed a lot, hasn't it?

Yes, very much.

For better or worse?

*For the better, definitely. Now I have my own things, and I find life more interesting. I have more responsibilities, I feel more like a man. And when my daughter Byambadolgor was born I was so happy. Two years ago I was just a single man, but now I have my *ger*, my family, my animals, my child who will follow in my footsteps. Now I am really a man.*

His mother and brother gave him the animals that were his due and helped him to build his *ger*. The *ger* is the centre of Mongolian shepherd culture: it is a round tent about six metres across assembled on a structure of painted wood, with a conical roof and a decorated door. A *ger* can be put up or taken down in a few hours, and it contains everything the family owns: an iron stove in the middle for heating and cooking; a couple of beds against the wall, which serve as seats by day; wardrobes, the mirror, family photos, a small altar and a clock. In Jiigee's *ger* there is also a small television set.

I have electricity because I have that solar panel outside. I traded a cow for it. So



when there is sunlight, I can watch TV and use this lamp.

A year ago, Jiigee bought a cellular phone and he says that it has made his life much better: now he can talk to his mother in the town, and to relatives and friends. Mostly, though, he has discovered that it can help him earn money. Last March, the merchant who buys Jiigee's cashmere offered a low price, as he always has. But this time, Jiigee called friends in town and they told him the market price. The merchant paid up and Jiigee felt great: he was no longer a poor foolish shepherd, an easy mark for city slickers.

The *ger* smells of meat and tea with milk: a stranger is greeted with smiles and something to eat. Hospitality is a basic obligation among nomads. Jiigee says that tomorrow

they are going to take the *ger* down and look for summer pastures. The steppe belongs to no one: everyone finds a place and leaves it when they're done. Jiigee says if they arrive somewhere and find it occupied by another family, they have to keep moving.

There are never fights over places?

No, what for? There is always somewhere else to go.

Jiigee's days are regulated by the sun and the seasons. He wakes at dawn, eats breakfast – tea with a lot of milk and salt, and a piece of meat or cheese. Then he lets out the sheep and goats and cleans the fold while Marta milks the cows. At about 8 am, he goes uphill with the sheep and goats. Those hours are fairly calm. He lies down on the

grass and looks at his animals; he dozes off or thinks about things; how he will make his flock grow; how much wool he will sell this year; what his daughter's life will be like.

Do you want her to go to school?

Yes, of course.

But you didn't, and you are doing well... Why do you want her to go?

If you don't go to school, you can live a life like mine, taking care of animals, living in the country. But I would like my daughter to study and learn many things. I would like her to be able to live in the city.

Do you think her life will be better if she goes to the city?

This life has many risks. It is sometimes so cold that the animals die and you don't know what to do. Besides, in these past few years it has rained less, so everything is drier. Our life is getting harder and harder. If my daughter studies, she will be able to lead another life, an easier one. I have never been to the city, but friends have told me, and I have seen it on television: in cities, life is easier, there are so many things. There is

flour, sugar, rice, gas, clothing. People have new things, live in houses with electricity. Here it is not easy to buy things. When someone goes to the city, I ask him to buy me what I need.

And you don't want to go to the city?

I am not educated; I have none of the skills that would allow me to get a job in the city. It's better for me to stay here. I like my life here. I like my animals. I like knowing that they need me.

But there is work to do. In March the goats must be sheared, and later the sheep. In the fall, creams, cheeses and fermented milk will be ready for the market in town.

As night falls Jiigee and Marta have supper – a noodle soup, boiled meat, tea – and watch a little television: the news, a debate, a comedy show. At about 11, they go to sleep.

What differences are there between your life and the life of your father?

When my father was alive there was enough water. The grass grew well, the animals always had something to eat. That's no longer true, and that is bad. But when my

father was alive there was no electricity, no cellular phones or cars.

Which of the two times do you prefer?

I prefer my father's times, because nature was much better then. It rained more, there was less wind, the animals found good grasses as early as March. Now there are none until June...

And why is that happening?

Because of the gold mines. They used to be forbidden. Now there are gold mines everywhere. They are sprouting up like mushrooms, and they are really destroying nature. They consume too much water, and ruin too much land.

Jiigee is worried: he says that if they don't stop mining, the life of shepherds will get harder and harder.

There will be fewer and fewer shepherds and more and more miners, and poor people.

You don't want to be a miner?

No. I don't know anyone who has gotten rich looking for gold. Usually, they find just a little, enough to survive...

And do you know anyone who has gotten rich as a shepherd.

Yes, of course. Herding makes people richer and happier.

How? What's your plan?

I will increase the number of animals. I have 160 now; I will be able to sell more animals each year and eventually buy a truck; all I have now is a motorbike. I need money so that my children can live well.

What would you most like to own?

A jeep. With a jeep I could bring more water and wood, move my ger... Life would be much easier with a jeep.

But a jeep is for working. Don't you want something for pleasure?

Yes, a horse. I'd like to buy a fast horse to win the town's race.

Jiigee's eyes light up as he says this. After all is said and done, he is a Mongolian shepherd.

YOUNG PEOPLE + NEW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES = A FORMULA FOR CULTURAL CHANGE

Between 2000 and 2003 nearly half a billion mobile phones were added to the global network in developing countries alone,¹ and over a quarter of a billion people in developing countries now make use of the Internet.²

Young people have grown up with the new communications technologies, and they are often the first to find new uses for them. Access varies widely, but young people are 40 per cent or more of Internet users in a range of developing countries.³ In Indonesia, a little over 20 per cent of the total population has access to the Internet, but markedly more in the 15-19 age group.⁴

The experiences of young people in developing countries show that the Internet or mobile phones are having a profound impact.⁵ They have already changed youth culture and consumption habits, and attitudes to citizenship and activism.⁶ Their interactive and decentralized nature offers possibilities for education and employment; and, as Jiigee's story shows, opportunities that traditional communications cannot match.

Instant communication opens the world to young people – but it also sets them apart from traditional society, and sometimes in conflict with it. The values of the new youth culture are

not always in harmony with established ways of thought and action. The challenge is to find the balance between the two cultures.

Globalization in its different guises – not only new technologies, but open market economies, the rise of entrepreneurship and the trend towards more democracy, have brought greater freedom of choice; but they have also increased inequality and insecurity for today's young people.⁷ Although they adapt more easily to globalization and what it has to offer, many young people have not benefited, especially in developing countries,⁸ where inadequate education and poverty hold them back.⁹

Young people do not reject globalization as such, but they are voicing concerns about some of its consequences, including environmental degradation and the unequal distribution of income and wealth. In the past decade, their concern has gone global. Coalitions of non-governmental organizations, student groups, political organizations and civil rights activists are asking for a more equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits.¹⁰

Jiigee's story shows that poor and traditionally disadvantaged populations can benefit from new technologies. A similar story could be told many times: in the Indian state of Kerala, for

example, fishermen use text messaging to find out where to land their catch for the best price.^{xi} In some countries, sexual and reproductive health programmes text information on HIV prevention to young people.

New technologies can spread knowledge and information, provide avenues for employment and education and increase young people's opportunities for participation. The Internet is a window through which young people and their cultures get new ideas and values: but much more effort is needed to close the "digital divide" and let more people access the new technologies.



Kim

VIETNAMESE SINGER
HIP-HOP ARRIVES IN VIET NAM

Her parents named her Le. Three years ago, when she started her singing career, she decided to call herself Kim because she wanted a name that everyone could easily remember. Le was born in 1991 in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam: about that time, her country began a phase of industrial and commercial development that brought far-reaching social change. Le's parents, for example, have jobs that did not exist twenty-five years ago: her mother works in a company that makes computer games and her father in a commercial office. Le went to public school, played, painted trees and suns, sang the songs that her older sister listened to: a normal life that sometimes actually bored her.

Sometimes I thought that when I grew up I would be a teacher; sometimes I thought I wanted to be a businesswoman and own a company. I changed my mind all the time, never had the same idea for long. But I think that I wanted to do something different, because life seemed so boring.

Until one day when it rained and rained Le heard a song. By then she was twelve; the rain kept her home and she was listening to a pop compilation CD that she had bought the day before. Suddenly, one of the songs brought her to her feet with a pull she had never felt before. Le looked at the CD cover: a group called Bone Thug-n-Harmony. It sounded totally different. Le had just discovered hip-hop. She had the feeling that nothing would ever be the same.

Le started looking into who these singers were and what other groups played similar music. She looked everywhere, but it wasn't easy to find songs like those. At first she only cared about the melodies; then she felt the need to know what the lyrics said. She couldn't make them out, but someone told her that if she went to an Internet café she could find the lyrics on the web. Her English was not very good, but she began to understand that the songs spoke about black life in the United States, about crime, drugs, sex, money, social dysfunction and clashes with the police.

In Vietnam there are many songs, of course. But the lyrics are silly, they don't talk about real life: they are so false. When you listen to Vietnamese songs, you always hear the same words: you -love-, chia tay-break-up. For me it was a revelation to listen to songs that spoke about the lives of people, real things, freedom.

By now, Le knew what she wanted to do with her life: she would be a rapper, a hip-hop singer. At that point she bought herself, for the first time, a book: a Vietnamese-English dictionary to help her understand the songs. Le spent hours every day listening and singing at top volume: her parents could not stand the noise, and they told her she could listen only when they weren't home. Her sister didn't like the songs either; Le felt lonely, but more and more determined.

Some singers tell you that the road to music is rough; they make up stories. That's not how it was for me. My sister sang in a girls'

pop band, and she asked the head of her record company if he would let me audition.

Le got ready. She was very nervous, but tried to calm down. That morning, she sang a song by Tupac, *Thugz Mansion*: “Shit, tired of gettin shot at. Tired of gettin chased by the police and arrested. Niggaz need a spot where we can kick it. A spot where we belong, that’s just for us.” While she was singing, she had the feeling that they weren’t paying too much attention. When she finished, the man told her to rest for a while. Le was sure she hadn’t made it, and her sister tried to calm her down: don’t worry, she said, we can always try somewhere else.

"I wrote a real song about the school. Usual songs talk about beautiful schools, lovely students, innocent teenagers. But look at the reality: students have sex, they steal..."

But that afternoon the man from the record company called her and proposed a two-month trial and training period. They had her sing other songs, first in English and then in Vietnamese, and they taught her how to move and dance on the stage. The producer

who trained her told her that if she wanted to become a singer, the first thing she had to do was learn to please the audience, to sing the songs they like. Sometimes that made Le sad; other times, she thought that was a sacrifice she had to make to be what she wanted to be.

The day her trial period was over, the record company’s boss told her that she had been given a contract. Back home, Le looked at herself in the mirror, and decided that from then on her name would be Kim. She was amazed: at the age of fourteen, she was going to have what every girl wanted. She was going to be famous, admired, desired: a singer. But she was also worried:

I was scared I wouldn't be able to handle it, since I was so young. And the first times I had to sing in public I was frightened by the people down there looking up at me. I was also scared I would end up being a pop singer, when I wanted to be a hip-hop singer.

Mostly, Kim didn’t want to sing the same old songs about pure love, breaking up and getting back together.

I wanted to talk real. I talk about the life around me. In my first song I talked about how much I loved hip-hop. It did not work.

It didn't attract the audience. But I kept on writing about our lives. I wrote a real song about the school. Usual songs talk about beautiful schools, lovely students, innocent teenagers. But look at the reality: students have sex, they steal, they do some bad things. Nobody write that, they just write nice things. As a composer, I write about those others things too.

Economic development has meant that young people in Vietnam become: more autonomous, more mobile, and they have more places to get together; it is a life style that can expose them to earlier sexual debut. But for many, sex is still a taboo subject. In a recent survey, just over half the respondents said that contraception is only for married people.

So I write about teenage sex, pregnancy. Girls like popular boys in the class. These boys must be rich, act cool, smoke. And when they are in love the boy says, if you really love me we must have sex.

And you think it's bad for teenagers to have sex?

Well, it is not a bad thing. It depends on what you think. If you think the guy is good, a person you can trust... But you and

he are teenagers; he does not have a job, and you may get pregnant. He cannot take care of you because he lives with his parents and he has no job...

Kim was not intransigent: in her concerts she mixed some pop songs in with the hip-hop; while pleasing the audience, she showed them the songs that she really cared about. And, little by little, she became the leading Vietnamese hip-hop singer. Kim sings in English with a *Viet-Harlem* accent. She sees no contradictions in singing American songs. After all, the war was long ago:

There have been many events to heal the war. It's like the sun shining after the rain. I like tolerance and forgiving. It is my character to forgive and I like others to forgive. The war has become part of the past. Why look into the past, and not into the future?

Her first album, *Kim*, came out in September 2006, and it sold well. Its songs were played on the radio and some even made the charts. Kim had concerts, sang on television and represented her country at international festivals. At that time, a Dutch NGO, Medical Committee Netherlands, asked her to do something different: to work



with a group of women ex-drug addicts with HIV who wanted to put together a band. Kim encouraged the women to rap to the audience about their own stories: that is how Cactus Blossoms was born.

It was really moving. I understood how I could help others through music. These women spoke of how they had been infected, what it was like to live with HIV, the discrimination and stigmatization they experienced. Some people cried when they heard them.

Kim also had to deal with ignorance: her parents and friends told her to be careful when she was with the women with HIV, not to get too close or touch them.

Most people don't know anything about HIV-AIDS; they believe falsehoods. That's why I thought it was good to do this work, so that they would learn the truth about it.

It wasn't so easy: some members of the Cactus Blossoms asked that the show not be broadcast on television because they were concerned about discrimination against their families.

In 2007, a song by Kim, *Playing Hard*, was chosen as the official song of the Asian Football Cup: that was a major breakthrough. Though Kim is becoming well-known, she still has doubts: her producers ask her to keep including pop songs

in her concerts to avoid disappointing that segment of her audience; and for the time being she accepts. Being pragmatic, her next album will include two or three pop songs.

Why?

I care about the audience. I have to care about it.

To sell more records?

Yes, I sing hip-hop for teenagers, but older people don't want to listen to that. And I want them to buy my albums too.

Do you care about being famous?

Yes, we all care about that. Who doesn't want to be famous?

How do you imagine yourself at the age of thirty?

Uh, by then I will be too old to sing. But I imagine that I will have a lot of money and own my own record label. I will have a big house and help new singers. I imagine myself releasing a clothing line and having a place for kids to play x-games... But I am

not going to tell you anything else, because when you talk about your projects they just don't happen.

Right now, some of Kim's projects are about to happen. With UNFPA support, she is going to record a video clip and do a tour with songs about domestic violence, adolescent sexuality, reproductive health. In these songs, Kim keeps talking out loud about things that most Vietnamese people speak of in hushed tones, if at all:

“...Everyone has found their happiness:/ That's their family./ Why do we build up our families? It's to have a thing to love./ And No... I... Please, let's look at those children's eyes./ What do you see?/ I can only see tears flowing from the hurt children./ Is this the house that you are expecting?/ Or does it look like the collapse caused by a hurricane?/ Come now just think, is this the house of pain?/ Parents seem to be civilized, but inside they hide a lot of torture./ Being beaten, threatened and no one cares about them...”.

Kim sings at a feverish pace with a mix of anger and compassion in her eyes. Sometimes, she says, she forgets that she is seventeen years old, but usually she sees herself as a normal girl, who goes to school, does her homework, sings her songs, and goes out with her friends.

Do you have a boyfriend?

No.

Don't you want to?

Yes, I do. But when I like some guy, I don't know how to approach him, what to tell him. So the guy doesn't know I like him. And there are some that like me, but I don't like them. So I don't really know what to do to have a boyfriend ...

POPULAR YOUTH CULTURE TAKES ON THE WORLD

Global communication, the Internet and TV are changing the way young people grow up. A UN report calls it a “global media-driven youth culture”.¹ It is appearing in all parts of the world, especially in cities and towns. The global youth culture offers young people a frame of reference for their questions about the adult world as they explore the culture of their families and communities.²

Young people from all parts of the world are developing aspirations, values and attitudes at times in contradiction to the traditions of their culture. Youth-specific consumer goods and targeted marketing are found wherever young people have purchasing power and access to the media.³ These consumer goods and lifestyles, and cultural influences centred around music, movie, fashion, and sports stars, have produced a shared consciousness among young people and new patterns and forms of social contact. By way of videos, text messages and chat rooms, young people express themselves in ways that largely exclude adults.⁴ The process challenges and breaks down tradition, questions and alters authority structures.⁵

At the same time, wide variations continue within and among countries, and intergenerational relations are still to a large extent shaped at the local level.⁶ Young people use, adapt and interpret global media messages and products

in unique ways based on their own local and national cultures and their personal experiences, and create hybrid cultural forms in the process.⁷ As Kim’s story shows, hip-hop music may have originated in the United States, but it has become something different in other parts of the world.

So youth culture is both a global phenomenon and a local response and adaptation to it. This raises the question of who owns youth culture; and to what extent youth culture is produced by young people themselves or produced for them by the global media industry. Until recently a handful of corporations dominated the global music industry, but fans and commentators have regularly criticised popular music as being too commercial or fake.⁸ Now the Internet has changed the marketplace beyond the corporations’ capacity to control it, offering an opportunity for musicians and small entrepreneurs to reach limited but highly particular audiences. In this as in other areas, young people are finding ways to satisfy their individual tastes.

There are many examples of artists who have used their art to transmit social messages, in the same way that Kim is singing to her Vietnamese fans about gender equality and women’s empowerment. Music, movie and sports celebrities have become spokespersons

for social issues and humanitarian causes, influencing debate and action around them—and their own status with their global audience. Their popularity can help raise the profile of specific issues and draw the attention of mass media and young audiences. UNFPA’s goodwill ambassadors include a former Miss Universe, Mpule Kwelagobe, and Mary Banotti, an Irish representative in the European Parliament. Several UN agencies supported the Staying Alive campaign launched by Music Television International (MTV) which carried messages to young people about HIV prevention.

For those who have access, there is an unlimited quantity of mass media material; but quantity does not necessarily mean quality or variety. To offset the power of global producers, and ensure that young people can create, share and use material which suits their own tastes, demands support for innovation, and regulation of public as well as commercial providers. Young people, just like adults, should not be exposed to harmful content or material they have not chosen. At the same time, arguments about young people’s vulnerability do not justify denying them access to knowledge and power. Producers of cultural material should reflect young people’s own perspectives. They should be held accountable to the audiences they claim to serve.



Seif

PALESTINIAN PEACE BUILDER
A NORMAL KID, WITHOUT A COUNTRY

Seif is such a normal kid. He says it time and again.

We are normal kids, like all kids. The situation around us might be different, our ideas might be different, but first and foremost we are kids, kids like kids everywhere.

Seif was born in 1991 in Jerusalem. He lives in Birzeit, a town on the West Bank thirty kilometres from Jerusalem. His mother works for an NGO which processes micro-credits for Palestinian women; his father is an engineer on some important construction projects in the region. Seif is a child of that educated middle class that Palestinians have been able to maintain despite all their hardships.

And he led a normal life: he went to a bilingual Quaker school, he played football, he played computer games, he watched Tom & Jerry, he drew, he fought with his older sister, and studied as little as possible. Seif always watched the news (his father watched as do most people) and so from a very young

age he knew that there were problems in his country. But the first time he understood that something terrible was happening was that night in September of 2000 when violence broke out in Jerusalem. The next day it spread to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the second *intifada* started.

Before that, we were free. There was conflict, but we didn't feel it like we do now. Life was different before all that.

Seif was nine at the time. One morning a few months later, he discovered that his school was suddenly much further away. His school was eight kilometres from his house, in Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority; Seif usually went there by taxi with his sister. But that morning an Israeli checkpoint blocked their path: from then on, every morning for years, Seif and his sister had to get out of the car, go through the checkpoint, walk a kilometre under the sun on the empty road, wait on line to go

through a second checkpoint and get another taxi on the other side.

I was just a kid who wanted to go to school, and suddenly I was up against a soldier with a machine gun that ordered me around.

Near the checkpoint there were often stone-throwings, chases, shootings: the young people in the area participated in it.

Did you agree with them?

Yes. They were defending their homes. Who knows what they had been through. Maybe one of their brothers or their father had been in jail...

And did you throw stones?

Seif is silent for a moment and then he answers softly. With his beard and calm eyes, he looks older than seventeen. But when he is

faced with a question that he can't or doesn't want to answer, he smiles like the child he is. Finally, he says no, that he didn't throw stones.

Why not?

Maybe I was afraid, I don't know. I don't want to talk about it.

"I always liked the idea of being the one to teach, organize, run things... I like being able to tell others what I know, to tell them how to do things"

He thinks for a moment, and then says that throwing stones will not solve anything: "You might hurt a soldier or two, but they have machine guns. What can you do to them? It's not a good way. It doesn't work." Some of his friends have taken part in confrontations. On the West Bank, everyone has a story about a kid who spent months in prison for throwing stones.

And did you and your friends talk about the conflict?

All the time. For a while, when I was twelve or thirteen years old, it seemed like the only thing we talked about.

Seif's family is Orthodox though his parents are not very observant. But his grandmother would tell him stories about Jesus before he went to sleep; his sister went to church, as did Seif. He doesn't go anymore, though. "Maybe I got bored," he says. "I want to go, but I always think of something better to do." And, besides, he hasn't met his grandparents for eight years: they live in the Gaza Strip and, since the beginning of the second *intifada*, the two parts of the family have not been able to see each other.

But you still believe in God.

Of course!

And why do you think so many conflicts come to your land?

I don't know... that's the way life is. You have to deal with these things. In Heaven you won't run into this sort of thing, but here on Earth you have to go through it. It's like a test to see whether you can get into Heaven or not.

Less than two per cent of the four million Palestinians are Christian, and Catholics are a minority within that minority. Muslims make up the majority of the population. Seif says that in his town there are no problems

between the two religions, that everyone knows each other and they treat each other well. However, families in neither group are likely to accept that their children intermarry, for instance, and there are many stories of crimes committed to wash away the perceived 'dishonour' of a mixed love story.

So, when you'll look for a girlfriend you'll have to limit yourself to two per cent of the population, one out of every fifty girls. That lowers your odds considerably.

Seif laughs: he hadn't thought of that. But, for now, he doesn't care: for several months he has been dating a classmate, a Catholic girl. Seif and his girlfriend go out together, but they don't hold hands. That would be a provocation in their culture, he says; many people would be upset and they might react.

Three years ago, the situation on the West has improved somewhat, and Seif had the feeling his life would largely go back to the way it was before: he and his friends talked more about sports, music, girls, Star Academy. Seif is now in his senior year, and he does a lot of normal things: he watches TV, goes out or chats online with his friends, plays basketball, dances in a group that does *dabkeh*, a traditional Palestinian dance:



I like it. It's a way to express my love for my country, for our culture.

He sometimes even visits Jerusalem, so close and yet so far away. His parents are not allowed, but he goes from time to time with his sister. But it is not easy: they have to request permission from the Israeli authorities and they are never sure to get it. Seif also draws a lot, mostly Handala. Handala is a very famous character in Palestinian folklore, drawn by a famous caricaturist, Naj Al-Ali: a poor, barefoot refugee child, Handala is always seen from behind, angrily looking at scenes from reality: he doesn't say anything

but his silent look voices his criticism. Seif admires Handala and copies him:

Handala is like the conscience of the Palestinians.

From the time he was six, Seif has always gone to the summer camps organized by Birzeit's Catholic Church: there, kids played music, did sports and arts & crafts, played games and danced. Last year he took a course to become a leader at one of those camps.

I always liked the idea of being the one to teach, organize, run things.

So you like taking charge and sharing culture...

Yes, I do. I like being able to tell others what I know, to tell them how to do things.

Seif is vice-president of the student body at his school, and he wants to do something similar at the University of Birzeit, one of the most prestigious in Palestine, where he intends to study. In 2007 he was chosen from among many to represent Palestinian kids at a debate on the Graça Machel Report on Children and War at United Nations headquarters in New York. The trip was long: Seif had to go to Amman, Jordan, to take the plane, because Palestinians from the West Bank are not allowed to use Israeli airports. But Seif's arrival to New York was one of the greatest moments in his life:

I had seen it, of course, in photos and the movies, but I never imagined the buildings of the city would be so tall, so immense.

In New York, Seif spoke about how Palestinian kids suffer from the war. He said that there were a lot of kids who were cut off from their schools by the Israelis' separation wall: suddenly, one day they were on one side of the wall and their schools on the other.

“What had those children done to deserve this?” he asked, “What had they done to be suddenly punished like this, separated from their schools, their education, their future?”

Education and debate are among Seif’s main passions. Lately, Seif has given some courses organized by the YMCA for children from his area: they discussed gender questions: “Many believed that women were inferior, but they finally accepted that they are equal to men”; drugs and cigarettes: “I convinced some of them not to smoke, it was great”; HIV & AIDS: “that was to tell them about precautions”; and how to respect others, those who think differently “Because first and foremost we are all people with the same culture, whether we are Christians or Muslims, Fatah or Hamas, whatever.” But there is one issue that worries him more than anything else:

I don't know what's going to happen with my country. We are really normal people, but, because we are living under occupation, we have had to do things we never would have done.

Because of his involvement in community work, education and choice, Seif values dialogue and understanding. But civil participation has a limit: the conflict situation

under which he lives does not often let him apply these values to his country.

Next year, Seif is going to go to the university to study architecture because he wants to make houses for his countrymen and be a normal person. He also wants to keep working at the camp, giving his talks, dancing *dabkeh*, playing basketball and going out with his friends. And he wants to get involved in university politics and maybe, some day, in his country’s politics.

Sometimes I think that I would like that. But for that to happen I would have to have a country... That is our problem.

In the meantime, he will continue to work for building the basis of a peaceful society in his country. And maybe next door, in Israel, a normal kid like himself is also thinking about getting involved, building the basis for a peaceful society in his own country. One day, sooner or later, they will be happy to see together the results of what they have each accomplished to build change from within.

YOUNG PEOPLE PROMOTING A CULTURE OF PEACE

The Occupied Palestinian Territory is one of the few spots on the globe where people live under occupation. All young people living under occupation are at the centre of violence. Armed conflict robs many young people of their families, security, education, health, employment and opportunities for development.

In the brutal way of war, young people are recruited or forced into militias. They experience killing and maiming, sexual violence, prostitution, displacement, separation from family, trafficking and illegal detention. The indirect costs of war also hold back young people's development: less water, sanitation, health and education, and more poverty, malnutrition and disease.

There have been widespread concerns about young people as perpetrators of violence. "Youth bulges" in the population may make countries more susceptible to political violence, particularly when young people are excluded from development, unemployed and forced to the margins of society.² Young people with few opportunities for development are an easy target for recruitment into violent groups.^{2,3}

The nature of conflicts has changed. Low-intensity in-country conflicts are much more common today than wars between countries. If these conflicts are taken into account, the num-

ber of global conflicts has increased in the last ten years from 30 to 56.⁴ But violence can also be the result of long-term occupation which prevents generations of youth from experiencing self-determination and, thus, robs them and their families of a sense of dignity.

The ten-year strategic review of the Graca Machel Report on Children and Conflict identifies some of the priorities for protecting children and youth in conflict situations:⁵ (1) universal implementation of international norms and standards to end impunity; (2) care and protection of children and youth in armed conflicts; (3) stronger capacity and partnership; and (4) conflict prevention and building peace. In this last area, says the review, young people should be recognized as natural participants in peace-making and peace-building processes. Investing in young people's education, health, employment and overall well-being is also integral to building peace and preventing conflict.

Many initiatives are built on the recognition that young people's dynamism can transform conflict situations and build the foundations of democratic and peaceful societies. For example, the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, a global network of young people and youth organizations, has organized international working group meetings, peace-building training seminars and conferences.⁶The Great Lakes

Zone Young Peace Builders' Network operates in the conflict and post-conflict areas of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.⁷ UNESCO promotes the involvement of young people in peace-building through youth forums, and an initiative for inclusion in all UNESCO educational programmes called "Learning to Live Together: Promoting Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation".⁸ Cultural mediation and deconstruction of stereotypes is an intrinsic part of this process. UNFPA's sponsored youth networks also demonstrate how mobilising the energy, dynamism and enthusiasm of youth across cultures, creates opportunities to increase awareness around critical issues such as health, physical security, and education.

Involving young people, whether in peace-building or long-term development is important for any society afflicted with armed violence or occupation. Building a culture of peace with and through youthful minds is the basis for achieving sustainable peace.



Leire

SPANISH GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
ON A NEW HORIZON, A RISING STAR

Her parents were nervous. They sat down in front of the television, stood up, talked on the phone, sat down again. Leire noticed that something serious was happening, but she didn't understand what. She was four years old and the very young Spanish democracy was in danger: a police officer had seized Parliament and the Army was threatening a coup. Leire's parents were teachers, socialists, Basques. That night no one went to sleep at her house until the rebels finally put down their weapons.

I still remember it very clearly. I could see that everyone was nervous and I was worried...

Leire lived with her parents and older sister in Andoain, a small town near San Sebastián. From the time Leire was very small, her parents took her along to rallies and demonstrations. They were lively, colourful outings and Leire was never bored. But

when she was seven, her parents decided to exchange the grey skies and violence of the Basque country for the sun and peace of the Mediterranean.

In Benidorm, Alicante, Leire was an active, fun-loving child, "A good student but not a grind," as she says. Before she turned eleven, she was "class delegate", the one who represented her classmates before the school authorities. That's why her friends suggested that she run for school board. Leire thought up a campaign slogan, "Hit the target", and designed a poster with a drawing of a dartboard.

That's how I won my first election and became, along with two classmates, a counsellor. And it was really funny because my father was the school principal.

Well, so that was your secret weapon...

No, just the opposite. I had my main adversary at home.

And so Leire first got a taste of what she calls "that drive to have a voice and to represent the voice of others to change things." But she also liked going out with friends, going to the beach, playing sports. And her true vocation, she thought, was writing: she had won a few competitions and she was certain that she would do that when she grew up.

At the age of fifteen, Leire started high school and soon after joined two institutions that would change her life: *Juventudes Socialistas* – Socialist Youth – and her city's Youth Council. On the Council, Leire worked to increase cultural activities, recreational spaces and, mostly, jobs for young people from Benidorm.

Why did you decide to get involved in a political party, an activity that is not particularly popular among young people?

Well, that's something I learned at home; my parents have always been socialists, progressive people.

Children often do the exact opposite of their parents ...

That's true, but not in my case. From the time I was very young, I always knew that I was on the left, ideologically. And the context at that time was not exactly favourable: my generation, the first to be born in democracy, is very different from earlier generations. The only government it knew was the Socialist government, and it had not only distanced itself from politics but from that government, which had really run out of steam. Maybe that's why it was more worthwhile to work with the Socialist Youth.

"...sometimes when I asked a question in the chamber, a member of the conservative government told me that I was not old enough to ask that"

Leire participated in the youth protests that demanded and ultimately obtained an end to mandatory military service. At the same time, she kept doing lots of other things, like running a high school magazine.

Did your friends make fun of you for working with a political party?

No. Maybe they thought I was a little strange, but I never felt attacked. They did seem a bit curious at times, maybe a little sorry that I had so little free time... but there are also friends who admire you for your political commitment.

When Leire left school, she decided to study journalism. But the local university didn't have a journalism programme, and when she tried to register in Madrid she was told that students from other regions needed a better exam score than locals and hers wasn't good enough. Leire still gets angry when she remembers "that injustice," but she laughs and says "Anyway, we have taken care of that."

So she started studying sociology at the University of Alicante. There, she founded a students' association, Campo Jove, of which she was the first president, while continuing to work with the Socialist Youth, now as its treasurer. Leire was pure enthusiasm; she knew how to talk to people and how to organize others as well as herself. She spent hours and hours every day working on her different political activities. When she was twenty-one, she was made a member of the PSOE's – Spanish Socialist Workers Party – regional leadership. It was a very difficult moment: the previous year the Party had lost power and the leader, Felipe González, had resigned.

What was it like to be the youngster in the regional leadership?

At first, it was a challenge: everything seems new and you are not sure they'll pay any attention to you... For my voice to be heard, I had to make it heard.

Why did they take a chance on you?

Because I was well-known in the student movement, among the youth groups. I imagine that is what they saw in me.

And they needed a certain number of young people and women?

I don't have any problem with affirmative action. I have always been a firm defender of that mechanism, without which women would never have been able to show what we are worth or not worth, because the ones to choose were still men and we were always excluded from the realm of power. And I have never had any complex about being or not being a product of affirmative action, because I have always understood that those mechanisms have helped us.

Leire was twenty-two the first time she spoke at a campaign rally. She was very

nervous. She prepared a speech and rehearsed it: she was willing to do anything to make it come out right. She spoke of the problems facing Benidorm, of the importance of participation, of young people coming out to vote. She closed with a poem by Mario Benedetti.

If I love you, it is because you are my love, my accomplice and everything else. And in the street, elbow to elbow, We are many more than two.

When it was over, Leire was very moved, and so was the crowd: she had passed her first major test.

After all the problems we had in the Party during those years, I never thought that politics was a box of chocolates. What's more, right after that rally, I left for Ireland: I made a radical change.

She spent that summer washing dishes in a pub in Dublin, studying English and thinking about her future.

And it never occurred to me that in less than a year I would be a congresswoman.

Leire had decided to pursue a masters degree and was about to join an advertising agency;

but the night before signing the contract, her Party asked her to be a congressional candidate.

That night, Leire couldn't sleep. The excitement, the honour of the proposal, the possibility that her life might change, kept her awake. But so did the idea that this would be four – if she did well, perhaps eight – years of her life. Then what?

Leire spent that winter visiting towns in the region.

For me, it was an intense, unforgettable experience. It was a rough campaign, and we were received coldly. I remember some rallies where not only didn't people applaud, they didn't even smile.

Leire was elected to the National Congress in her Party's worst election ever. The Party was in crisis. Its leader resigned that very night in front of television cameras.

It was not a happy time; there was a lot of unrest within the party. I had to mature a lot, but it was rough...not always debate on policy, but power struggles.

Did that surprise you?

Well, I already knew that. But it is surprising to see how far, if you are not careful, you can move away from the voters.

Other life changes also started that night. A few days later, the press discovered that there was a new Socialist representative from Alicante who was not only the youngest in Spanish history but a woman. And so the Leire craze began: suddenly, she had become a national figure.

I felt an enormous responsibility: the feeling that if we did things right, we would open the door to a generation.

Doesn't it infuriate you that so many young people from your generation do not participate in politics?

No, because there are many ways to participate. I don't want to judge others: every person decides what he or she does. I have never believed that young people aren't involved with political parties because they don't care: that's a very unfair stereotype. My generation has often shown its commitment to the country through non-partisan political participation: anti-war demonstrations or going to clean up the coast after the Prestige oil spill or voting on a mass scale in 2004... Today, there are many ways of participating that are very different from twenty years ago.

Leire left home and moved to Madrid. In the Congress, she had to get used to many things – three-minute interventions, technical terms, behind-the-scenes discussions and negotiations. And also the cross of being a young woman.

Being a woman and being young meant I had to prove doubly that I deserved to be where I was. A young person is judged more than an adult, and a young woman more than a young man. Some newspapers spoke of my age and physique, and sometimes when I asked a question in the chamber a member of the conservative government told me that I was not old enough to ask that.

When she had got over being angry, she laughed: such crude remarks just proved how disconnected her opponents were from young people.

On her first day in Congress she met a young congressman from León, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. He told her with a grin that he had also been the youngest congressman. He also invited her to join a group of representatives to discuss the future of the Party: three months later, they took control and Leire was appointed to the Party's Executive Committee.

In March of 2004, she ran in Alicante again and the Socialist Party won a resounding victory. Leire remembers it as one of the happiest days in her life, “Not only because we won the elections, but also because I had had the privilege of constructing that project from the bottom up.” A few days later, the new president, Rodríguez Zapatero, named her Secretary of International Cooperation. Today, more than four years later, she still holds the post. In those years, the Socialist government doubled international aid; in 2008, Leire managed a budget of around €5 billion, or \$US 8 billion.

What's it like to have power?

I don't feel like someone with power; I feel like someone responsible for making decisions. I really mean that. I don't feel like a powerful woman. I feel like a woman responsible for making decisions and aware that the decisions I make affect people.

And you feel a little pleasure as well?

Yes, I do... When the things you fight for happen: when you see results, see some things change, see your ideas becoming reality.

Very briefly, what are your ideas?

Very briefly: freedom, equality, solidarity, the basic concepts of social democracy. I believe that politics changes the world; if you don't decide they decide for you. I am not satisfied with the world in which we live; it is still unjust in many areas, like gender: I have always been a feminist and equality for men and women is a basic value.

Leire has spent most of her adult life in public view. She says that of course no one has made her do what she does, and that she feels privileged. But there are drawbacks.

You don't have a set schedule; you know what time you start in the morning but not what time you leave in the evening; it's hard to plan a vacation. All of that affects your private life, the people close to you. And for women the problem is even worse because you have the issue of motherhood, which makes it that much harder. I think you have to find time for yourself. It's not only a personal need, but also essential to being able to do your job well: you have to be connected to reality.

At the time of this interview Ms. Leire Pajing was Minister of International Cooperation. In July 2008 she became the Organization Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party.

FORGING SOCIAL IDENTITIES: CULTURAL BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

As young people become adults they take a bigger part in social, civic, and political life. They meet and work with people beyond their immediate families, finding their own identities as they do so.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)¹ says "All children have a right to express their views and to have them taken into account in matters that affect them". Ensuring that young people can exercise their rights and encouraging their participation helps both individuals and communities to develop.

Gender and age, as well as income, education and family ties, help decide who can participate. Young people, especially young women, are at a particular disadvantage – many societies bar adolescent girls and young women from taking part in the public life of their community.

When young people become active citizens they help their societies see what is culturally important. They extend the limits of political possibility.² Young people are not part of their elders' networks of alliances and rivalries, of favours owed and given. They are more receptive to emerging values and worldviews.³ Welcoming young people into public life "teaches them to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won".⁴

Young men and women are making their way in political cultures which have usually valued experience over youth, and men over women. Though few young leaders have reached Ms. Leire Pajin's level of political power, she shows the extraordinary contributions a young person can make. Growing numbers of young people are joining in civic activities, mainly at community level, but more and more at national and international levels. Young people mentor younger children; educate their peers in development programmes; expand the youth sections of political parties; become activists, entrepreneurs, and leaders of new initiatives. They are assets to their communities and active agents of change.

Governments, civil society and international organizations are coming to know the importance of involving young people in decision-making. Governments now include young people in their delegations to international conferences; international and national conferences create spaces for young people's forums; international agencies seek their advice. UNFPA, for example, has a global youth panel and national youth advisory panels in more than 30 countries where young people advice on programmes.

At community level this recognition has been slow, in particular for adolescent girls, but this is

changing. Moldova for instance has set up youth councils as forums for youth representation and empowerment in more than a quarter of all localities. Young people in Nicaragua have created spaces to work within their cultures and participate in local councils.

Social institutions should prepare young people for active citizenship and help them make positive contributions to their societies. They should consider the varied ways in which young people engage with their communities and the processes by which young people acquire political and civic values as they begin to participate in public life as adults. They should educate young people to accept diversity, and ensure that they include marginalized young people, especially girls.

Generation of Change: Young People and Culture

The seven stories in this report show the challenges facing young people growing up in the first decade of the 21st century. The stories show Grita, Tsehey, Daniel, Kim, Jiigee, Seif, and Leire in their daily lives, each working to enjoy and transform their own cultural surroundings. Culturally sensitive approaches to development help young people to be more effective in changing the harmful elements of culture, while celebrating the positive aspects that enrich their lives.

The cultural experience of young people is a hybrid of many different elements. Because young people are not limited by their parents' experiences and memories, they are generally flexible and dynamic. They have the potential to become agents of change.

The complex streams of culture have intense effects on young people, leading them to challenge gender stereotypes in sport; to become champions of other young people

in their passage to adulthood; to adapt international music to the realities of local life; to bring new communication technologies to one of the most isolated regions on earth; to rise to the top echelons of government; to live in peace in a land at war; to escape child marriage and claim the right to choices in life. By doing all these, and more, young people are changing themselves and their cultures.

Development programmes should support young people such as these to negotiate a place in their society. Young people need the skills to embrace their local culture: to change what hurts them, such as harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation or child marriage; and support what helps, like better information and services for their sexual and reproductive health, and the prevention of violence against women.

Steeped in long tradition, older generations may resist these changes. Programmes

need to open a space for dialogue between generations. Their approach should spring from deep sympathy with the culture, respect for its ways and knowledge of its history, power relations, politics and economics. Culturally sensitive approaches will equip development programmes to help make human rights and gender equality a reality in all societies, and young people their most visible champions.

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