

**Rap: A tool for promoting change amongst youth in  
West Africa? The case of AURA's Poto Poto project,**  
*Myriam Nedjma Horngren, January 2011*



(Priss K, AURA member) Photo Plan International

*Tutor: Flor Enghel*

**University of Malmo, Sweden, School of Communication  
Master course in Communication for Development**

**Project Work**



(Big D, AURA Member) Photo Plan International

## *Abstract*

With 60% of the youth population under 25 (OECD 2007)<sup>1</sup>, West Africa possesses an abundance of potential, but also faces major challenges. It is currently unable to provide this youth with adequate opportunities or provide them with a voice that could influence their regions to their own advantage.

This research explores an initiative developed with the aim of engaging the youth of West Africa in the promotion of children's rights through the medium of Rap music.

This initiative was launched in 2006 at the behest of AURA<sup>2</sup>, a network of seventeen African Rap artists who have come together for the promotion of Hip Hop and to put their musical talents at the service of the development of Africa. AURA's first project was an awareness raising campaign focusing on the promotion of children's rights called Poto Poto which means mud in Wolof<sup>3</sup>.

My research focused on audience response to the Poto Poto cultural products through the participation of eight young people in a focus group organised in September 2010. Although based on a very small number of respondents, findings indicate interesting and useful trends with regards to Rap as an effective tool for social engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/pages/0,3417,en\\_38233741\\_38246608\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/pages/0,3417,en_38233741_38246608_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> Artistes Unis pour le Rap Africain / United Artists for African Rap : [www.aurahiphop.com](http://www.aurahiphop.com)

<sup>3</sup> Wolof is the official language of Senegal (together with French), a language also spoken in Mauritania and the Gambia.

## **Acknowledgements**

I became aware of the AURA network and the Poto Poto project back in the summer of 2008. As an independent consultant, I was involved in an advisory capacity in the West Africa region for an international NGO called Plan.

In February 2009 and 2010 I was asked by Plan to evaluate AURA's Poto Poto project. I developed a real passion for the project over that period and have been fortunate to study it as an academic research project. I have been involved with this project for eighteen months and it has been a thoroughly enjoyable time! I have particularly appreciated the opportunity to travel to Dakar, Senegal, and to be able to spend time listening to the Poto Poto album at length .Being in touch again with key contributors to the project and spending a wonderful day with the young people who took part in the focus group discussions has been an added bonus.

I am indeed thankful to all those that facilitated this research project directly and indirectly. These people include Stefanie Conrad and Florence Cissé from Plan West Africa Regional Office (Plan WARO), Rap artist Didier Awadi, Aziz Dieng from Accents Multiples, the eight young girls and boys who generously gave of their time to share their thoughts with me. And last but not least, Marie and Paul for being such wonderful hosts.



(Awadi and Araba, AURA members) Photo Plan International

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(Keyti, AURA Member) Photo Plan International

## Introduction

*“AURA represents the rallying cry of an optimistic youth convinced that Africa has the ability to triumphantly overcome all her challenges.”<sup>4</sup>*

It is under this banner that, in 2007, AURA sprung onto the Rap and Pop musical scene of West Africa. Bringing together artists from the whole sub-region, AURA launched the Poto Poto project, an awareness raising campaign.

The AURA Network consists of 16 Rap artists from 9 West African countries and include: Senegal (Awadi, Big D, Xuman, Myriam from the all female Rap band Alif Keyti), Guinea (Moussa from Degg J Force 3), Mali (Jo Dama from Tata Pound), Mauritania (Waraba aka Big Power), Burkina Faso (Smockey andSmarty from Yeleen), Ivory Coast (Priss K), Niger (Pheno B and Safia from Kaidan Gaskia), Gambia (Egalitarian), Benin (Mouna from DCH), Togo (Bobby from Djanta Kan).

*Map of West Africa:* [www.solarnavigator.net/.../West\\_Africa\\_map.jpg](http://www.solarnavigator.net/.../West_Africa_map.jpg)

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aurahiphop.com/ENGLISH/auraeng.html>

AURA was created following a pan-African meeting of rappers which took place in Dakar in February 2005. The meeting was organised by Plan International and Accents Multiples.

Accents Multiples, a partner of Plan, is a Dakar based organisation focused on cultural mediation. To coordinate this project, Accents Multiples was financed by Plan International<sup>5</sup>.

Plan International is an international children's development organisation founded in the early 1930's in the United States. Its head office is now located in London, UK, and is present in 48 developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas. On its website, Plan defines its mission: "*to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty*"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aurahiphop.com/ENGLISH/partenariatseng.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://plan-international.org/about-plan>

Plan International is financed through a combination of child sponsorship<sup>7</sup> (70% of its funding) , governmental grants (AECID-Spain, AusAID-Australia, CIDA-Canada, DANIDA-Denmark, DFID-UK, Irish Aid, KOICA-Korea, MFA-Finland, MFO-Netherlands, Norad-Norway, Sida-Sweden, USAID-USA) and institutional grants (European Commission, The Global Fund, UNICEF, World Bank and the World Food Program)<sup>8</sup>. In West Africa, Plan's head office is based in Dakar, Senegal and it coordinates the activities of Plan country offices in Benin, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mali, Togo, Ghana, Niger, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Senegal.

## **Context**

### ***The Poto Poto Project***

The project's overall objective as per the AURA Project Proposal document (2005, p1) was to "increase the understanding and engagement of marginalized West African youth in important development and child rights issues to claim entry into policy and decision making".

The main target audience was "3.5 million youths between the ages of 15 – 25, from mixed backgrounds, 50% girls/ 50% boys, urban and peri-urban" through electronic and press media as well as live performances (AURA, Project Proposal document, 2005, p 3). Launched in July 2006, the Poto Poto project is a collaboration between AURA and Plan, facilitated by Accents Multiples.

The project was rolled out in seven countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. AURA focused on the artistic element of the project through the elaboration of songs, the production of the album and lead input in the live musical / Rap Opera and the singles' videos. During the 2006 – 2008 periods, Accents Multiples dealt with the management of the artists and the implementation of the project (logistics for concerts, videos, etc...). It was the bridge between Plan and the members of AURA. Plan was involved in the financing of the project, the training of the artists on issues of children's rights, on advocacy (engaging with governments and institutions) and involving children with the artists, through school visits and youth club meetings.

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<sup>7</sup> "Plan's work is made possible thanks to nearly 1,100,000 people in 18 donor countries who support us by sponsoring a child". <http://plan-international.org/about-plan>

<sup>8</sup> <http://plan-international.org/about-plan/finance/grant-funding>

Poto Poto originally consisted of the production of a CD called "*The extraordinary stories of the POTO-POTO children*". The CD included 12 songs where each artist played the role of a specific child. The songs describe the harsh lives experienced by many West African children. A child soldier, an AIDS victim, a child prostitute, a drug dealer, a victim of a forced marriage, a servant, a rich problem child, a sick child<sup>9</sup> were examples used.

Poto Poto means both “mud” as well as “difficult/hard times” in Wolof. It is an imaginary market place which is supposed to represent the kind of environment where many of children in West Africa grow up.

At end of 2008 about 40,000 CDs were printed to be distributed for free at concerts and youth-related events organised by Plan. The tracks were also available for free streaming and download on the AURA website. Two tracks were promoted as singles for the album: “Bienvenue à Poto Poto” (Welcome to Poto Poto) which was number 2 in the charts for a period of two months in the Radio France International (RFI)<sup>10</sup> and Poto Poto Dancing<sup>11</sup>. Both singles were also promoted by video-clips available from the AURA website and on social network sites such as Youtube and Daily Motion. The “Bienvenue à Poto Poto”<sup>12</sup> video reached number one on satellite channel Trace TV<sup>13</sup> in a programme called “Hit des Rues” (Streets ‘hits) for a month. Trace TV focuses on Pop, Hip-Hop and R&B in Africa.

Free live performances were also organised and these evolved into a fully-fledged Rap Opera that toured in most of the artists’ home countries including Dakar, during the Jazz Festival in Senegal, the Waga Hip Hop Rap Fest (Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, one of the largest Rap Festival in West Africa), Benin, Togo, Mali and Niger. As a first in the West African region, the Rap Opera got considerable media coverage - national, regional and international. Project documents indicate that by end of 2008 about 159,000 people had attended the events (Annual Progress Report 2009, Page 5).

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<sup>9</sup> To illustrate this see the video of the main single *Bienvenue à Poto Poto* available on::

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qf1OamO1vg>

<sup>10</sup> RFI is the international arm of the French State radio Radio France which broadcasts internationally, including West Africa

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPeVvkh3xUk&feature=related>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qf1OamO1vg>

<sup>13</sup> “TRACE is an international brand and media group dedicated to producing and distributing music and sports content to multicultural audiences via all digital platforms”. [http://eng.trace.tv/f\\_company.php#trace](http://eng.trace.tv/f_company.php#trace)

## **General background on child and youth's well being in Africa**

*“The future of Africa lies with the well-being of its children and youth... Today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development.” The African Union in ACPF 2008<sup>14</sup>*

In 2008, the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), an independent, not-for-profit, pan-African institution carried out research on the African child. Based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, it released “How child friendly are African Governments?”, a report on the state of children's lives in sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

As an echo to the African Union, it highlights that in most African cultures, “parenthood is about social responsibility (...), many people can fulfil the role of parents without having genetic ties to children” (ACPF, 2008 p1). This social practice is still a reality in many countries in Africa; however because of globalisation, modernisation and most importantly, urbanisation, this community based anchorage for children is changing rapidly.

In parallel, the African State is becoming the dominant force in African societies and gradually taking responsibility as guarantor of rights (through their commitment to international human rights law). Lately the West African region has experienced an economic up-turn with GDP growth of 6.7% in 2007 and 6% in 2008 (ECOWAS, 2008, p 4). This has provided many countries with some economic progress and has facilitated an increase to the levels of budgets dedicated to health and education. With respect to child protection, a theme particularly relevant to the Poto Poto project, many West African countries (Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo<sup>15</sup>) have ratified their national laws with international law and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> African Child Policy Forum

<sup>15</sup>List of signatories: <http://www.africanunion.org>

<sup>16</sup>The full ACRWC document is available on: <http://www.africanunion.org>

Despite all the good news, in 2005, 43% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa lived on below US\$1 a day (ACPF, 2008, p 4).

### **Violence, orphans and shelter**

The ACPF report (2008) shows that violence remains a pervasive problem throughout Africa. It reports that millions of children are subjected to harmful traditional practices (female genital cutting, early marriage, rape and harassment) and thousands more are victims of war whilst many more suffer from violence at home, at school and in their communities.

Indeed, as the report highlights, children in Africa are considered precious because they provide social protection for their parents in old age or in sickness. Yet, children are also often abused in the name of what tradition dictates or because they are not perceived as beings with the same rights as adults (ACPF, 2008, p32).

#### *Early marriage:*

In a report by UNICEF, the organisation indicates that “traditional practices, though, are not carried out with the aim of harming the child but are connected to the socialisation process of the child in society and to marriage.”(UNICEF, 2005, p 8). However they do go against some of the international human rights commitment. Early marriages, for instance, can lead to lifelong health problems and yet some 42% of women between 15 and 24 were married before 18 in Africa (ACPF, 2008, p 33). In West Africa, as many as 55% of women give birth before the age of 20 (ACPF, 2008, p 33).

Another traditional practice is Female Genital Mutilation, a deeply engrained tradition that affects millions of girls across the continent. In 2005 UNICEF estimated that in sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt and Sudan, three million girls and women are subjected to FGM every year (ACPF, 2008, p 33).

#### *War children:*

According to ACPF millions<sup>17</sup> of children are caught up in conflicts. Girls are more at risk during conflicts due to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war (prostitution, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, forced termination of pregnancy, forced sterilisation, indecent assault and trafficking) (ACPF, 2008, p 36).

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<sup>17</sup> I was told during my visit to Senegal that exact numbers around child violence are very difficult to disaggregate and this is specifically true for war children.

A special category of war-affected children, relevant to one of the songs in the Poto Poto project concern current or former child soldiers. “Child soldiers are often abducted from their homes, schools or communities and forced into combat, whether by government forces, rebel groups or paramilitary militias. Child soldiers are subject to brutal punishment, hard labour, cruel training regimes, torture and sexual exploitation” (ACPF, 2008, p36).

An increasing area of concern is the rise in the number of orphans in Africa. According to estimates by UNICEF 3.1 million of the region’s children could be orphaned this year (ACPF, 2008, p36).

*Talibés:*

The data collection for this Project Work took place in Dakar. One key theme which came back during focus group discussions was the issue of the Talibés, which is highly prevalent in the capital of Senegal. Therefore it seems relevant to give background on this traditional practice which has often deviated from its original purpose and meaning.

Talibés, are children sent by their parents to live with a Marabout for religious education in Quranic schools. Part of the education involves some agricultural work and children also used to be sent by the Marabouts to beg for food in the community as a way to learn humility. Human Rights Watch states that whilst hundreds of thousands of children go to Quranic schools in Senegal, there are at least 50,000 children exploited by Marabouts who have turned religious education into economic exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 2010, p 9). Talibés are essentially boys of between 5 and 15, who are put in a situation of high vulnerability when sent to beg in the streets. Talibés who do not bring back enough money are subjected to abuse and harsh physical punishment (UNICEF, 2005, P 12).

These are some of the specific-related issues which children in Sub-Saharan Africa have to face, on top of being affected as much as adults by other health or poverty related problems (lack of housing, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, lack of economic opportunities, etc.).

It is a direct response to these challenges that the Poto Poto project was constructed, deliberated and implemented.

# Presentation of the Project Work thesis

## ***Theme***

The Poto Poto project was built around the promotion of children's rights as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>18</sup>. It deals with various themes (violence, lack of access to education and health for example). The most recurrent theme content in the Poto Poto CD is dealing with the different types of violence and abuse that children are subjected to in their daily lives, such as beatings, war, rape, early marriages. Therefore the project report will focus mostly on the violence aspect that the album describes.

The World Health Organisation defines violence as, 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, 'maldevelopment' or deprivation.'(UNICEF, 2005, P6). This definition of violence covers most of the violence described by the lyrics of the Poto Poto album. However other types of violence are raised in the album that are not included in this definition, such as the lack of access to health services. Whilst this is not direct physical violence, this could be called structural violence, in the sense that structural inequalities are at the root of this injustice and as such, is a form of violence in itself. Another form of violence described in some of the Poto Poto lyrics, is the indifference of the adults and of society at large, to the violence inflicted against the children. The lack of mobilisation against violence, whether physical or psychological, is intrinsic to the cycle of violence. I would argue that these less direct forms of violence should be added to the World Health Organisation's definition and I have taken these two parameters into account in this research project.

## ***Research questions***

I decided to focus my research project on the audience's response to the Poto Poto project, from the perspective of Rap's potential to promote young people's engagement with social change in West Africa.

The questions I explored are:

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

- How does the audience read or understand the Poto Poto songs available in the album and the visuals (such as video-clips of the songs, album cover, website and recorded footages from the live concerts)?
- How do they engage with the issues raised, when confronted with the album, in discussions with other young people from the project's target audience?
- What, if anything, is specific about Rap as a music genre in engaging youth in West Africa on issues of social justice?

The questions try to address how an audience engages with an art form such as Rap within a particular set of cultural products developed to influence audiences on child rights. So whilst the project aims at influencing audiences, this research will first focus on what an audience (through a focus group) “does” with the media text whilst the assumption behind the original project as developed by Plan and the artists, is that the media text can influence an audience on child rights. Most of the data for this will be collected through focus group exercises. Then, with the last question, we move to explore what might, indeed, be specific to Rap which could trigger social engagement, i.e. what the media text “does” to people. Therefore whilst we are interested in the media and the effect of the media text, it is with the audiences that the focus of the research will remain, and what audiences, and not media, do with the media text, how and why. This is because audiences are not just passive receptors to media but take ownership and try to make sense of what the media may pass on. Additionally audiences are not groups that are free from other influences beyond media but are also influenced by an entire social, cultural and political context both present and absent from medias. And it is this interaction between the media text and the audience that we are interested in. However media is able to set the agenda (Halloran in Hansen *et al*, 1998, p 7-8) and therefore decide, by the fact that it provides audiences with the only content available to audiences, what is talked about and what is not, as well as provide what Halloran calls a “climate of opinion”, or create a certain consensus around specific issues. This is why we are also interested in what the media (and in this case Rap, may do to audiences) and in what is specific to Rap with regards to putting children's rights on the agenda, specifically amongst young people.

Poto Poto appears to be a very unique project. Indeed, I have not been able to find other such extensive entertainment and communication projects focusing on Rap as a tool for change in the West African Region (bringing together large live theatre/musical like performances, a concept album, two videos and engaging over ten national and international artists over a two year period). Consequently I felt that there was a lot to learn from such a vibrant initiative. Exploring what worked in the Poto Poto project with regard to audiences, could assist the planning of future projects which consisted of similar material.

## ***Methodology and Limitations***

### **Methods**

“... good research usually benefits from the use of a combination of methods.” (Hansen *et al*, 1998, p1)

As a researcher for this project, I had to ask myself which methods to use to best obtain answers to the research questions. It seemed necessary that I had to access project information so as to understand the project better as well as existing content on the issue of Rap in Africa. Additional reading provided guidance around both understanding the process of social and political engagement.

It can be difficult to decide what literature might be useful to best inform the research process and as a novice researcher, to deal with the situation that one might not find the kind of literature material that addresses specifically the issue at hand. Indeed there is very little research available on Rap in West Africa. This led me to explore writings on Rap in Africa and I came to use an essay by Stroeken on Tanzania’s Bongo Flava. Indeed, there are similarities between the Rap scene in both Tanzania and other parts of West Africa, specifically Senegal<sup>19</sup>. There is more on Bongo Flava around though, than I have included here. However Stroeken effectively highlights key criteria that help define why Rap might be specific as an art form to engage young people in social change. Stroeken’s text, though, puts emphasis on the success of Rap because of its refusal to engage in providing political or social solutions. Poto Poto on the other hand, is a project made in collaboration with an international NGO to exactly do the opposite as it tries to

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<sup>19</sup> “It is no coincidence either that the one African country with a track record in hip-hop comparable to that of Tanzania is Senegal. It had Leopold Senghor, another founding president belonging to the grandparental past of visionary socialism. A positive model of leadership (...) provides the rapper with a powerful ancestral spirit to harass the ruling elite.” (Stroeneke, 2005, p489)

raise awareness around child rights. There is therefore a potential contradiction or limitation to Stroeken's text in relation to Poto Poto. However this Project Work focuses on the cultural products and audience's reactions to those; therefore within this perspective, Stroeken's text is still relevant. Indeed, whilst the artists might have been engaged in collaboration with an international NGO, the Poto Poto cultural products are very much in line at the level of the language, image and attitudes with what is described by Stroenke in Bongo Flava.

I also developed a short questionnaire with the purpose of obtaining a quick picture of public knowledge of the project. The advantage of the questionnaire is that it is a useful tool to collect data for the project in a standardized manner and with this project specifically. I used the questionnaire to gather whether there was a similar level of recognition of the project's cultural products amongst the members of the focus group. The questionnaire was a self-completion questionnaire, encouraging respondents who were attending the focus group to fill in the questionnaire as they came in to the room. All respondents to the questionnaire were the members of the focus group panel. The number of respondents was too small to be able to refer to this exercise as a survey and cannot be representative of the entire target audience that Plan had hoped to reach. However it does show that amongst those young people, key cultural products from the project were recognizable to all respondents as well as clear indications of the channels where those products had been seen or heard.

The second and main tool I used to collect data from the audience was the face-to face focus group, which was fairly directive as I developed an interview guide and a series of exercises for members of the group to undertake throughout the day. According to Hansen, focus group interviews allow the researcher to collect "potentially much richer and more sensitive type of data on the dynamics of audiences and their relations to media than the survey." (Hansen *et all*, 1998, p257). This is done through the time given to respondents to reflect on issues to a greater degree than during a survey questionnaire. But it is the interaction between members of the group that is most enriching as "audiences make sense of media *through conversation* and interaction with each other." (Hansen *et all*, 1998, p258). Despite of some of the logistical challenges in organising

such research exercises (see sampling section below), the popularity of the focus group method for media research may be explained by the current focus in the field of media research on how audiences use and create meaning or understand media content and media technologies instead of focusing on the direct influence that the media have on people (Hansen *et al.*, 1998, p 260). The Focus Group helps extract the meaning that people make out of the media text presented to them. It is that specific “meaning making” that I was particularly interested in here and which justified the use of focus group research for this Project Work. My hope was to be able to collect, in audience’s responses to the Poto Poto products, what was specific to Rap which may or may not trigger social engagement. I chose the focus group method because as Deacon (2007, p57) explains “they are seen to produce rich qualitative material, well suited to detailed interpretive analysis. Furthermore, their group basis is claimed to provide insight into the interactive dynamics of small groups and to mimic the way that everyday media interpretations tend to be “*collectively constructed*” by people in social, familial and professional networks.” This was verified during this field research as different exercises were proposed to the members of the panel. They were usually asked to work as small groups and then come back to plenary and present the findings from their small groups discussions; the floor was then open to engage all members of the focus groups to react to the presentations. This created the type of interaction which provided opportunities to go into more depth in certain areas. Indeed this happened during this research when I witnessed changes in the opinions and perceptions by the members of the small groups when they were engaged by the rest of the panel to explain their findings, or when confronted with differing opinions. Usually they tended to go deeper into their thinking than the findings in the small groups tended to show. Additionally focus group work “impel participants to think about and stay with the subject being discussed in a way that is *not* natural.” (Morgan in Hansen *et al.*, 1998, p262.) Whilst I was not fully aware of the non-natural process when undertaking such exercises in the past, I felt it was useful to be able to stick a group of people to reflect on one issue. I felt it was useful because I could collect data as mentioned above, but also because these types of exchanges created other unexpected layers of reflection for all involved, myself included. This means that learning took place not only for me as a researcher, but also may prove a space for reflection and learning for the members of the group themselves. Indeed it is unlikely that these young people ever

reflected on the Poto Poto cultural products to the extent that they were asked to do here for one day and to the depth that they went into. I have experience of focus group exercises working as a Consultant where respondents themselves told me after a focus group exercise that “*this was the best training they ever had*”, when no training was intended. As a researcher, focus group work is not only about data collection, it is also an experience of exchange and mutual learning. Of course this entails a level of unpredictability one has to feel comfortable with but it allowed for ideas to be discussed that I had not previously considered. This means that some level of control is being relinquished to give space to the other in forming his/her own space to reflect about areas of interest to her/him, which the researcher might not have thought of originally. Somehow the “predatory” business that can be the felt experience of data collection is somehow turned into a space of exchange and mutual learning.

Finally, I also interviewed two respondents involved in the Poto Poto project. Florence Cissé is Plan West Africa Regional Office (WARO) Regional Media Assistant, working in the Plan WARO Communications Department. She managed the Poto Poto project with AURA and Accents Multiples. Florence was in charge of the administrative follow-up and was involved in accompanying the artist and producers in the seven countries of the scheme. Second interviewee, Didier Awadi is one of the key founders of the Rap movement in Senegal and more largely in West Africa (more information in Annex). Dider Awadi co-wrote and co-produced the music and the lyrics of the Poto Poto album<sup>20</sup>. Interviews were conducted over Skype, as unfortunately there was no time to meet with the two interviewees whilst I was in Dakar. I used two different interview guides and conducted those as semi-guided interviews. I used Pamela Recorder to record the conversation. Pamela Recorder works as an online tape recorder linked to Skype. It is a useful device to record a phone interview, without any face to face or direct connection with the interviewees.

Deacon justifies the use of semi-guided interviews when research requires information collection which might entail some level of reflections or sharing opinions by the respondents which would be difficult to collect through a questionnaire or paper survey (Deacon, 2007, p67). Here interviews were used to gather information about the

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<sup>20</sup> [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didier\\_Awadi](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didier_Awadi)

production of Poto Poto cultural products and to clarify and at times be confronted with some of the qualitative data gathered through the focus group. However there might be as many perceptions as there are Rap artists or producers (as Accents Multiples was heavily involved in the production process as well). Their level of involvement might defer (from writing lyrics, developing melodies, or simply performing or rapping or anything in-between) but each could provide further food for thoughts on input around Rap as a tool for social change. The two interviews are, however, very informative and available in full in Annex.

Unfortunately I did not use the interviews in this report as much as I had originally intended because a restricted level of space meant that I had to make a choice on the data presented and analysed. My choice was to focus more on the findings from the focus group. I am aware though that in making this choice, some voices will be more “heard” than others and therefore that this Project Work is angled specifically to audience research, which brings its own limitations to the possible breath of analysis such a project can provide. For instance, we could have focused on confronting the views of the producers to the focus group findings. Undertaking such confrontation could be a very useful take on the AURA project. However, this was not how the research was thought through, as interviews were used as complementary to the focus group.

As a researcher I am therefore constantly aware of the choices that I have had to make in prioritizing some sources of information over others whilst also having to include quite a large amount of data because various research methods were used. Whilst all the forms of research add a layer of findings and knowledge to the analysis, there will still be areas for analysis that will not be covered : “The very nature of social science impinges once more – but choices have to be made, and in the end we cannot dodge the issues of validity or values.” (Halloran in Hansen *et all*, 2007, p30).

## **Sampling**

For the research project I decided to work with a quota sample of the population the Poto Poto intended audience. With quota sampling, the researcher “decides on a range of criteria that is likely to be important to the study and then sets a series of quotas in relation to this that are filled to produce a representative sample.” (Deacon, 2007, p52).

The variables for the research's quota were taken from Poto Poto's audiences, as per Poto Poto's project document:

- 1) youth between the age 15 – 25,
- 2) from mixed backgrounds,
- 3) 50% girls/ 50% boys,
- 4) urban and peri-urban

Looking back at the variables for the quota sample, what is unclear is what the “mixed background” variable actually means and how the sample could have covered a sample wide enough to cover whatever “mixed background” might mean. This probably indicates that the project makers were at some level unclear about the exact audiences they wanted to reach and for what purpose. This uncertainty is now reflected in the elaboration of the quota sample.

Originally I had hoped to bring together 15 young people to split into five groups of 3 to work together throughout the album and the various other outputs from the project. I was hoping to work over two days to explore the awareness, raising part of the project but also the social engagement part of the project.

However, being based away from where the members of the focus group live means that I could not directly organise the sampling and relied on Plan to help gather the panel for the focus group. This made sense due to Plan having direct access to the kind of individuals that were targeted by the project, as Plan works directly or indirectly with youths in the field. These youths would have been part of already constituted groups, either as members of children's clubs or radio projects or other community based children focused development projects. Indeed, this is how Plan does its work with children at community level.

This would have provided the research with children from the targeted group age coming from a rather economically deprived background (a majority of youths in Senegal) but with an already existing knowledge of children's rights issues, as Plan's constituency tends to target the most excluded communities. This would have potentially put a bias on the findings, specifically angled to a population knowledgeable about human rights but probably not representative of the project's target audiences.

However the organisation (a partner of Plan WARO) which was supposed to facilitate the research with the young people had the majority of their staff on holiday and could not

facilitate the sampling. I became worried that I would not be able to access a panel at all. Therefore Florence Cissé phoned a few young people she knew through Plan activities to ask them to take part in the research and asked them to invite their friends. Two of them were able to help and brought their own friends along. This explains why two of the respondents knew of Plan and its activities whilst the other members of the panel did not.

### *The panel*

In the end, the panel was made up of four females and four males, coming from cities' suburbs of Dakar and Saint Louis. Three girls were of the age of 15 and went to the same school. One of them was involved with Plan activities in the place where she lived and she had brought her friends along to the panel. Her friends were not directly involved with Plan. One girl came with three of the boys. Their age range was 20-24 years old. One of the boys was involved with Plan activities and he had brought four of his friends with him. One boy came later on, a cousin of the younger girls, in his early twenties, he did not directly know of Plan.

Even if the sampling quota is unable to address the issue of the “mixed background” variable, the panel, in the variety of its members, was probably a better reflection of the audience that came into contact with the Poto Poto project than I had originally thought of. Indeed, the majority of young people targeted by Poto Poto were those that would have had little or no knowledge about children's rights. I would contend therefore that the change in the sampling did not impact negatively on the research and potentially even brought it closer to the reality of the audiences originally targeted by Plan in the project. However, the reality of what happens “in the field”, sometimes unpredicted and unpredictable, especially in parts of the world where organising such exercises are a challenge in themselves, has to be taken into considerations when organising such exercises.

At this stage, I would like to indicate clearly that I am fully aware that 8 respondents cannot be a full representation of an audience that consists of 159,000 people, (this figure, is the average audience that have attended the live performances in West Africa, according to my interview with Florence Cissé) and be even less representative of the millions of others who would have heard of the Poto Poto tracks on the radio or seen the videos on TVs and video sharing social networking sites. This has therefore an impact on

the findings collected through some of the research methods I used, specifically with regards to the questionnaire. Simply put, these findings cannot be extended to the whole population which attended the concerts or to the even greater number of people who came into contact with the cultural products. Therefore the findings which rely on representative sampling cannot be used to advocate “truths” about Rap and social engagement nor about the impact of the Poto Poto cultural products.

Whilst it is recommended that numbers of focus groups for media research oscillate between two to six depending on the focus of the research, I found myself with one group of 8 people instead of 15. I feel the issue of size is relevant here, in the sense that I feel that 8 respondents were not enough to cover the breath of opinions I would have wanted to gather, it also reduced the number of respondents per exercises and the number of exercises possible. However Deacon infers that studies more concerned with generating “intensive *insights*” (Deacon, 2007, p45) do not require large numbers because the aim is not to extend these findings to the whole population. The small numbers of participants though, mean that many other readings or opinions or reactions to the Poto Poto cultural products have not been explored at all or not to the extent that additional respondents would have provided. Indeed as observed by Livingstone and Lunt, “The number of focus groups was determined by continuing until comments and patterns began to repeat and little new material was generated.” (Hansen *et all*, 1998, p 269). This would have been an ideal approach for this research because without having to interview a large audience (which would have been difficult and expensive given the size and geographical location of the project’s original target audience), this sampling approach would have provided the research with a real breath of audience’s responses to such a large project and probably would have provided more comprehensive findings.

However, I believe that the findings should not be totally disregarded either, because couched in other studies on Rap as presented in the literature review as well as input from the two interviewees, we are in the presence of findings which might be useful in raising new questions or considerations for future research, as well as in providing key questions to consider for future similar projects.

There is another issue linked to the sample for the focus group put together by Plan, both the initiators of the Poto Poto project and also a client of mine. As explained above, this was necessary due to the fact that it would have been very difficult for me to access

young people in Dakar in other ways. However, to address the issue of potential conflict of interest or impact on the research because of Plan's intervention in the sampling, I believe that Plan's participation did not impact much on this research.

First of all, Plan ended up bringing young people together, the majority of whom they did not know (as they only knew two of the respondents). Then, the Project Work is not a study about Plan (there were no questions about Plan in the discussions with the respondents), but a research about audiences' reactions to the Poto Poto cultural products to explore the potential of Rap as a specific tool for social change.

Hence, there is very little that objectively could concern Plan because the research is in fact a step removed from its participation in the project, although some areas for reflection can be traced back to their own management of the project, but this occurs in a very seldom manner in this research.

### ***Other limitations to the study***

The fact that the Poto Poto project is now finished means that I was unable to attend the live performances and unable to have access to audiences which had participated in the live performances. However, I had access to a short documentary of one of the live performances which was shown to the members of the focus group and which facilitated some discussions around the live show.

Plan had not been able to monitor and collect data on audiences during concerts. Nor were they able to follow up on any impact measurement work, which means that no data is available to compare, support or contradict the findings from this research.

There was also a question of time - and capacity to access focus group members. Originally, I planned to travel in May, but May is exam time in Senegal and young people are simply not available. In July and August students are on their summer break so I pushed the research back to end of September. I also intended to work with young people for 2 days, but only had access to them for one day. This reduction in time meant that the focus group's respondents had to go through quite an intensive day of discussions and some exercises had to be cancelled. This means that the research is not able to

explore the area of taking action for change, or how Rap may engage young people to become involved in social change.

This research focuses on the cultural outputs of the project. These cultural products are only one (if not negligible) part of the project as other activities such as meetings with children, media junkets, and advocacy activities were undertaken by the artists. Therefore this research does not aim to evaluate the Poto Poto project as a whole, but only to take inspiration from this project to explore audience reaction to some of the project's outputs so as to reflect further on youth, social engagement and cultural/media provisions.

### ***Thesis Structure***

This research project is built around three main pillars. Part 1 presents theories around the history of Rap in West Africa, and will explore the specifics of “Rap as a tool for social critique”. The literature review will also delve into the circumstances of youths and their engagement in social change. Then theory will expand in defining praxis. Finally I will reflect on the concept of undertaking audience research and the inter-action between media texts and audience action. The second part of the thesis will concentrate on presenting the research findings from the focus group day and questionnaire. Finally those findings will first lead me to reflect on what they might indicate for working with young audiences in the future, and I will explore what the findings may tell on the opportunities and challenges that surround the use of Rap as a tool for social change.

## Presentation of theories

### *Literature review*

Within this context, below I discuss the literature that I used to explore the issue of Rap, youth and youth engagement and audience research.

Fangafrika, *La Voix des Sans-Voix* (Stayclam, 2009): There seems to be very little academic literature on Rap in Africa (aside from pop magazines and fanzines that comment on the daily news of the various stars in R&B and Rap), and even less on Rap in West Africa. This is very surprising considering the popularity of Rap in the region and the number of Rap artists being able to earn a living in West Africa. Fangafrika is a box set containing *a CD compilation of songs* from West African Rap artists, *a documentary* on Rap in West Africa and *a book* recounting the emergence of Rap in the region, contextualizing it in the social and political context from its inception in Cote d'Ivoire in the mid-1980's to the big Rap names of today.

A nascent hip-hop scene started in Abidjan in the mid-1980's originally influenced by American, and to a certain extent, French Rap coming in the continent. It is with PBS (Positive Black Soul<sup>21</sup>) in the early 1990's that West Africa discovered a politically conscious and vocal Rap which tells of the unhappiness and harsh realities of the lives of youth in the region. In the introduction of the book, Soro Solo, an Ivorian journalist describes Rap as “the arm to hit African politics or to speak out against the stops-and-starts of African democracy. Rap is portraying itself as the rallying cry of the forgotten of African politics and for a space to rethink a new Africa” (Fangafrika, 2009, p7). The book emphasizes that Rap is part of a West African tradition which combines a variety of artistic endeavours descending from the times of slavery to fight all forms of abuse and violence (from Gospel to Blues to Fella Kutu). Hip-Hop is just the last in a line of politically minded struggling artists, although the book also links Rap to the Griots tradition where the text is more important than the music. The main definition for Griots

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<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia In French only : [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive\\_black\\_soul](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_black_soul)

is bard, guarantors of the traditions and musicians. They are present in Senegal, Mali and Guinea. As a professional group they are equal to artisans and therefore belong to the lower rungs of society, but are respected for their talent and knowledge (Isabelle Leymarie, 1999)

Fangafrika, in recounting the history of Rap in the sub-region, lists an extensive list of Rap artists that have become real opinion leaders, singing in French, English but also in Wolof (Senegal) and other national and local languages. One example is the engagement of those artists in Senegal during the 2004 elections, calling youth to vote for Abdoulaye Wade. More recently presidential candidate Ali Omar Bongo from Gabon has used Rap extensively to woo young voters in 2009<sup>22</sup>. Interest from the political spheres could indicate that Rap is perceived as an effective means to reach young people. However, Fangafrika does not really define why or how Rap is an effective form to engage young people, or how and why Rap artists are indeed the spokespersons of youth and the most excluded. Fangafrika notes a variety of examples of Rap artists' activism in the sub-region, the assumption seems to be that the artists' activism is able to influence audiences. Whilst the Wade example could support this assumption, it is not enough to say that Rap artists influence audiences for that influence to be effective or real.

Stroeken's study (2005) focusing on *Bongo Flava* (the local brand of Tanzanian Rap) is a useful take for this assignment on the connection between Rap and social critique. He defines Rap as rooted in the politics of the Civil Rights movement, accounting for the "life at the periphery of society (*and which*) raised political awareness, just as civil rights movement had done before" (Stroenke, 2005, p488). Therefore the nature of Rap is first about raising political awareness amongst the most excluded in society. However, Rap has now become another product of mass consumption and, he defines "gangster rap", as a "show of predatory sexuality and of power for its own sake" (Stroenke, 2005, p488). The relevance to this project is that he compares this new form of Rap to the political sphere in Africa today: "In a surprising analogy, a similar cynicism, or pragmatic of predation, has been observed by Mbembe (1992) and Bayart (1993) among the postcolonial elite in Africa."(Stroenke, 2005, p488).

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<sup>22</sup> Desourcesure.com July 2009 [http://desourcesure.com/medialand/2009/09/ali\\_bongo\\_le\\_president\\_meloman.php](http://desourcesure.com/medialand/2009/09/ali_bongo_le_president_meloman.php)

Indeed, Stroenke (2005) argues that the answer to the social inequalities and the harsh laws of the streets that we find in many African countries is met with personal enrichment for the happy few at the expense of the majority of the dispossessed. Therefore Stroenke (2005) argues that in post-colonial Africa, the ideals of the Gangster Rap “*Get Rich or Die Tryin*”<sup>23</sup> is similar to the “*grab-what-you-can-while-you-can*” attitude of the African ruling elite of today. Stroenke (2005) argues that the gangster rapper in the US and the political elite in Tanzania use similar strategies of survival (Stroenke, 2005, p502). He adds that it is this trend in African politics which is at the root of Bongo Flava in Tanzania. Bongo Flava is a form of socially conscious Rap, which uses the codes of Gangster Rap (the streetwise language and codes of the harsh laws of the streets, such as expanding on the experiences of child prostitution, violence, street children) and a similar cynicism to that of the local ruling elite to shed light on what is going in Tanzanian social and political life. For Stroenke (2005), Bongo Flava is therefore able to question the status quo between the African ruling elites and the swathe of the dispossessed. Stroenke’s analysis is very much relevant to this research project as I believe that with an album like Poto Poto, AURA is using similar techniques as Bongo Flava to connect with its audiences.

Those techniques are:

- 1) “Keeping the songs’ accounts close to real life” (Stroenke, 2005, p502) or how Rap artists are able to describe the experience of the harsh laws of the streets from within, as full actors of this harsh life, from the child prostitute or street kid to the more experienced “gangster”. Indeed, by rapping as defined child characters, (the child soldier, the talibé, the orphan, the forced bride,) I argue that the AURA artists are able to speak as those who experience the abuse daily. They do so from the “I” perspective, and speak and behave from the perspective of the character. Those same characters are rooted in the harsh laws of the streets (a child soldier, a drug dealer, a girl prostitute) and the view point of the child is that which is most prevalent. As in Bongo Flava, it is the recognition of the “real” experience sung

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<sup>23</sup> My own inclusion, this is the title of US Rap artist 50 Cent’s best selling album, pretty explicit in its ability to clearly state that Rap has moved to prioritising a “get rich quick” attitude and is little about changing the system or about political engagement anymore, at least in the US

- by these fictional characters which provide the space for reflection and awareness raising for the audience, as the latter is placed in front of its own direct (if they are themselves children victims of abuse) or indirect (if they are part of the societies described in the songs) experience.
- 2) As well as cultivating the “real”, Stroenke (2005) argues that the relevance of Bongo Flava lies in its capacity to remain “inside”. This means that the Rap artists are able to cultivate the “real” without ever themselves being part of the solution for that change, without saying who is responsible for the situation and what needs to happen. The credibility of Bongo Flava with its audience lies in its capacity to engage in social critique, using the codes of gangster rap of violence and suffering, whilst refusing to become a moralizing force commenting on what should or shouldn’t happen (Stroenke, 2005, p490). In short, Bongo Flava avoids the trap of sounding “*preachy*”<sup>24</sup> and it does so through a process of “immunization” where the artists remove themselves “from the suspicion of moralism” (Stroenke, 2005, p490). This technique is also used in the Poto Poto album as the character-like story telling and the theatre-like format mean that all the songs remain within the experience of the child character and never resembles a political manifesto. As an awareness raising project, Poto Poto’s aim is to inform. However it does so in a way to keep the audience “on side”, for the audience to make its own mind up about who is to blame and what needs to change.
  - 3) Rap, in prioritizing the “real”, could be unique in diffusing this reality and in providing both a message on what is going on, but also in providing a space for recognition of what is going on. Indeed, Stroenke (2005) adds that the strength of Rap lies also in the pessimism of the lyrics. He calls this “invoking the impasse”, or the fact that social injustice is described and decried but stops short of pointing the finger or of offering a solution (Stroenke, 2005, p490). This leaves the audience to connect with the lyrics and to think for him/herself, providing the listener with some power on defining the world he or she lives in. In a similar fashion, the lyrics which bring life to the Poto Poto characters are often sad and provide little hope for a solution. Poto Poto is focused on highlighting the

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<sup>24</sup> My own inclusion

complexity and heterogeneity of their societies defining the malaise as a collective reality without any simple solution.

These are some of the characteristics which Stroenke (2005) suggests typifies Rap and it is those technicalities, he argues, which make Rap, at least in the Tanzanian context, an effective tool for social commentaries with which audiences can identify. We will see during the focus group discussions how these techniques were perceived by the members of the research panel, if they were perceived at all.

Even if Rap is getting older (Public Enemy and Didier Awadi are now rappers in their forties), Rap is still listened to by young people and viewed as a youth cultural product. In the case of Poto Poto, Rap was chosen as the most effective cultural channel to target a youth audience. Therefore I also looked into literature around youth and their relationship towards this media, more specifically, Rossana Reguillo's article "The Warrior Code" (2009). Reguillo argues that youth is often criticized for its apparent apathy and disconnection with the official spheres of school, politics and work. This point is clearly relevant to this study and its investigations. Fighting apathy and engaging youths in social and citizen participation, is the overall objective of the Poto Poto project.

Yet, as per Reguillo's argument, more importantly than apathy, youths are removing themselves from the spheres of school, work and politics because no space is made for youths to enter these domains and because they cannot see themselves participating meaningfully. They remain with a "not in this way" attitude (Reguillo, 2009, p26). She continues that, whilst youth might be showing some commonalities around the globe in its relationship with the world and with the media, youth is not experienced everywhere the same. Whilst a majority of youths in the North are able to access an increasing number of media and powerful technologies, the majority of youths in the South are not only left to deal with some of the abuse and the poverty mentioned previously in this document, but, with an extensive digital divide which excludes extensive groups of young people from communication technologies. Additionally this makes it even more difficult for them to enter the networks and the virtual communication spaces to have a voice and to participate in the "public sphere". With Poto Poto, and specifically Rap

music, Plan was hoping to create that space, where young people could recognise themselves and start engaging with issues that are of concern to them. In Reguillo's analysis youths are offered only the option to be passive consumers at best or forgotten by the system entirely at worst. "For those (*young people*) south of modernity" (Reguillo, 2009, p36), with little or no access to school or work or even hope of a future, it is difficult to involve them in any meaningful way with respect to social change.

I would contend that Rap can indeed be a mechanism to include exactly the type of youths "south of modernity" whom Reguillo refers to. Whether it is a mechanism for social change, or whether creating a space automatically leads to social and/or citizen engagement is another question. However, Reguillo's work helped me keep in mind that the target audience is not just an audience to lead to action, but an audience of young people with possibly very different immediate priorities and needs than engaging as citizens. Yet it is only by their engagement that their opinions might, at some point, be taken into account.

In their article "Role of Agency, Praxis and Conflict Resolution in TV Program", Lemish & Scholte (2009) contend that "a media message can be purposely designed and implemented to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior" (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p196).

Poto Poto is a project which uses the entertainment of music and live musical theatre to raise awareness of the lives of the majority of children in West Africa and to engage youth in social change. Lemish defines engagement (or agency) as "the practice of acting in social life" (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p197), and praxis (or taking action) "as actions conducted through understanding and moral judgment" (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p198). They go on to explain that there are different levels of activities related to praxis which can lead to conscientisation and empowerment. These activities include various levels of actions such as the questioning of one's readiness to identify essential problems or conflicts which affects one's life, reflecting on the nature of this situation (is this situation

fair? humane?), and then posing action options (such as tactics, assessing risks, planning, etc.) (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p198).

I have found this “*grading of engagement*”, defined by Lemish and Scholte useful, to help me reflect on the different level of engagements that could be produced and how it could be cultivated or conceived. In the context of this fieldwork, I looked at the results of the focus group’s discussions, through the grading of praxis actions defined by Lemish and Scholte.

In trying to answer the research’s questions, field data will be read through the aforementioned grading of praxis applied to the Poto Poto cultural products. We will try to see whether members of the panel are able to identify issues, reflect on them and propose actions.

Andy Ruddock’s book *Investigating Audiences* (2007) presents opportunities and limitations that have been useful in guiding the fieldwork for this project work.

*The power of media:*

According to Ruddock (2007), media has an impact; the real question is how and to what extent? “Media power is hard to find mostly since it is hard to define. Do we find it in thoughts or behaviours? Does it happen instantly, or over a long period of time? Is it possible to distinguish media from other sorts of social influence? If not, how are we to account for their cultural importance?” (Ruddock, 2007, p1). This is what audience research helps us define.

The notions most relevant to frame the research are:

- Can media messages trigger social change?
- What are the key elements for an effective media text to engage audiences?

*Media messages and social change:*

According to Lazarfeld (in Ruddock, 2007) people tend to use media messages to reinforce opinions that they already hold. Lazarfeld suggests that media messages are used “selectively”. Either people seek out content that they know relate to their own

understandings of the way things are, or else interpret texts according to their own pre-existing beliefs, regardless of what the media texts actually say.

Ruddock (2007), referring to Gitlin, reminds us that it is assumed that media power triggers change. However it is perfectly possible to argue that the reverse might be true, that the media, in fact stabilise traditional beliefs. It is useful in the context of this research to keep questioning the assumption, which often exists in the Communication for Development community, that media can trigger social change. This would also put a restraint on Lemish and Scholte's take that media texts can be designed purposefully to trigger engagement and social change (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p196). However what Ruddock in fact suggests, is that an audience will be open to new information or to engage with new issues based on its prior knowledge and the beliefs / values it may already hold. Poto Poto is a project built on the assumption that the diffusion of messages will bring social change. We will try and see in this research to what extent the project challenges, comforts beliefs or informs attitudes with regards to the issues raised in the album, the videos and the live show.

*Power and the media:*

Ruddock argues that audience research is about investigating power, either the power that media has over people or what power people have over the media. Indeed, as Ruddock suggests, "since one can never completely fix the meaning of a sign, one cannot assume that audiences will accept "preferred media meanings" (Ruddock, 2007, p59). Consequently, what meaning will be gathered by the panel members in relation to the Poto Poto products will be explored in the field research, although it will be difficult to compare those to preferred meanings. Indeed those have not really been defined by the projects holders and it is unclear what the messages are about. Are the messages looking to mobilise, inform, take a specific action? For the purpose of this research the findings will be confronted to the agenda of change towards greater well being for the child and also to my own understanding as a researcher.

Ruddock adds that whilst audiences make media texts their own and that media messages can be somehow transformed by the power of the audience, he argues that audiences do not do this solely under conditions of their choosing or outside the context they evolve in. This would tend to indicate, that "media power relates to the fact that everyday life is

media related rather than media centred... while the media offer us a range of images and ideas that we can ignore or reject. At the same time they create a common cultural archive on which we all draw upon, in making sense of the world, ourselves, and other people.” (Ruddock, 2009, p26).

In this research I started being more interested in what power media could have over audiences, i.e. I am investigating whether Rap has an influence over audiences through the Poto Poto project. Therefore media’s influence is what I am primarily interested in. Yet reading Ruddock, led me to also look at how the focus group’s members took ownership of the media texts produced in the Poto Poto project and how they interpreted those within their own reality.

*Media and learning:*

As mentioned above I was particularly interested to engage with the potential power of media as a tool for engagement through learning. Yet we have to keep in mind that media is part of social, economic and cultural contexts, and is affected by those, as much as it contributes to building these contexts. Ruddock reminds us that information travels through media and non-media communication processes (word of mouth for instance, or a conversation between friends) (Ruddock, 2007, p36). These various forms of diffusion of information produce different findings and therefore we have to keep in mind that social contexts and different media contexts (text, audio, video, live performances) play a large part in how information is received and understood (Ruddock, 2007, p22).

Therefore, in my fieldwork, I explored how and to what extent this might apply to Poto Poto, where the texts come in the form of the album, the videos, the online presence, the live show, the newsmedia, the leaflets, the promotional magazines, the radio and TV interviews and how these different forms of media might influence the experience of the audience, through the reflections coming out of the focus group’s discussion.

*The necessity for pleasure and authenticity:*

Poto Poto is an awareness raising project using entertainment to connect with its target audience. It has pulled on all current and available entertainment formats to captivate and

hold its audiences attention. Ruddock (2007) refers to Roland Barthes' theory on how "jouissance" has an impact in how the audience engages with a media. I will explore during the focus groups discussions, whether Poto Poto's entertainment aspect does or does not produce the type of pleasure to truly engage its audience. Finally, Ruddock argues that for successful audience engagement with media, some level of authenticity is crucial and argues that "well intentioned campaigns are easily ignored if they fail to understand or connect with the life and world of those they try to help" (Ruddock, 2007, p36). This would tend to support Stroenke's theory (2005) on Rap and the fact that it can connect with its audiences because Rap is able to remain authentic to the lives and experiences of its target audience.

## **Presentation of research findings**

### ***Findings from the questionnaire***

Eight people answered the questions (questionnaire available in Annex). At the question whether they knew of AURA, all respondents answered "yes", indicating that panel members were somehow familiar with the collective. When asked how they knew of AURA<sup>25</sup>, all respondents included radio and TV. 4 people ticked radio as where they had heard of AURA, 3 people picked concerts (although they did not automatically attend the concerts, they had heard of the concerts), 2 through videos (TV), 2 at school, 1 through magazine) and video chart topping success that the song "Bienvenue à Poto Poto" mentioned above in the background of the project.

When asked who they knew in the AURA collective, the majority of respondents knew of the Senegalese artists and knew much less of the artists coming out of other parts of West Africa. With 5 Rap artists from Senegal being part of AURA, the Senegalese Rap scene is well represented in the project. Therefore one can consider the possibility that this high level of presence recognition would serve well the large diffusion of messages to a wide audience on the rights of the child, at least in Senegal.

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<sup>25</sup> They could choose more than one answer

When asked which song they knew of the album, the two singles from the album were the most well-known: Bienvenue à Poto Poto (ticked by 7 respondents) and Poto Poto Dancing (ticked by 5 respondents). Respondents were also very clear that Poto Poto was about three things:

- The lives of children in Africa
- Africa's societies
- The lives of African people.

When asked which song they preferred, the majority answered "Bienvenue à Poto Poto", for the diversity of people and activities shown in the song and the video. However "Poto Poto Dancing", although known by most of the participants in the panel, was not mentioned at all in the "favourite song" question. This trend will be re-emphasized when the group later on discussed each of the two video singles and much debate will come out of analyzing the "Poto Poto Dancing" video.

### ***Findings from focus group discussions***

*(Full transcript of the discussions available in Annex)*

Eight young people attended the focus group discussions (seven to start with and an additional respondent who came in at midday). The day was split into three exercises, the participants were provided with food and drink throughout the day and a free copy of the album was given to them at end of the day.

**Exercise one** asked the participants to each listen to three songs of the album and to comment on those.

The songs were selected based on languages that were understandable to the majority (French and Wolof, one contained some English but that song was given to the older boys who all also spoke English). The songs were:

Group 1: *Enfant soldat* (Child Soldier), *Braquage à Poto Poto* (Pot Pot Hold Up), *Talibé*.

The group included three boys and one girl.

Group two: Jay Xale Yi (Child Trafficking), la Promenade (The Walk), l'Enfant Abandonné (Abandoned Child). The group included three girls.

The groups were asked to listen to the songs and to reflect on the following questions:

- Which song do you prefer and why?
- What meaning do the songs hold? What do they try to say?
- For each of the songs what feeling do you have and why?

The groups would then feedback to plenary and additional questions were asked, including:

- What do you think these situations (*presented in the songs*) are like?
- What did you agree on and why?
- What didn't you agree on?
- What do you think of Rap as a music genre? Do you listen to it? What other music do you listen to? What's different?

*Group one:* To the question Which song did you prefer?, three out of four respondents chose the song “Talibé”, saying that “*the song denounces the work that the Talibés are forced to do, a work that serves as pretext for education which is in fact just begging. It is a song that denounces. The song is also melodious, so it is not just the content but also the form. The music is sad.*” A daily reality for anyone who goes through Dakar, those kids are everywhere. So for anyone in Dakar, this is probably the most “real” situation of all the six songs that were chosen, or the scenario that is closer to their lives. When asked about the meaning of the song and how they felt about the songs<sup>26</sup>, Group one responded that the song was a denunciation and that under the pretext of education a child is in fact being made to beg on the streets and that it is trying to legitimise begging. The feelings were very strong, talking about “*compassion*”, “*pity*”, “*sadness*” and that “*it is not natural to get an innocent child to beg*”. One brought it very close to his own experience by explaining that his aunt would provide clothing and a shower to some Talibés children

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<sup>26</sup> Here I originally wanted them to go through each song and tell us what each song was about. But I probably was not clear enough because both groups focused only on their favourite song. So I ended up catching up on that in the plenary discussion, asking them why they did not choose any of the other songs.

in her area. The tone of the feedback was strong and emotional; this was visibly an issue close to their hearts.

The same respondents were also asked why they did not choose any of the two other songs, whether “Braquage à Poto Poto” (Hold Up in Poto Poto) or “Enfant Soldat” (Child Soldier). Both songs created strong feelings, whether of injustice at the callousness of the characters who act out the hold up<sup>27</sup> or the sadness at the extreme experience of the child soldiers. But they were not chosen because too removed from their life experience. In the words of one of the respondents, “*the song is over the top. Here in Senegal I have never heard that such thing has happened. We have pickpockets but we don't have hold ups. Maybe in other African countries, for some of the other artists in the collective who experience other situations*”. Another respondent noted though that in Casamance<sup>28</sup> such a thing could happen.

Moving on to “Enfant Soldat”, the song created less of a reaction in the group, because this is a situation that, although not of direct relevance to Senegal, the members of the panel were very conscious that this was a reality in other parts of Africa. This somehow made it more “real” to them and therefore did create a sense of connection. To them, child soldiers are more of a reality reflected in their own vision of what Africa is, than the hold-up described in the song “Braquage à Poto Poto” song.

*Group two* chose “Enfant Abandonné<sup>29</sup>” as their preferred song and when they presented their motivations, they often slid into the examples of Talibé children (although Talibé children cannot be completely considered orphans), reinforcing the direct connection from the audience to the theme of kids being seen to spend a lot of their time on the

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<sup>27</sup> On a more reflective note, “Braquage à Poto Poto” was a song that was trying to be clown-like, but it seems that a few times things that I thought were funny were not perceived in the same way by members of the panel. I saw there and then that my understanding and my own sensitivity to the songs or videos was often different. To me Rap can be serious, ugly, violent, sexist, moving, engaging but also funny. However, when I interviewed Senegalese Rap artist Didier Awadi who was very implicated in this project, he did agree that there was an element of humour throughout the album (and in the “Braquage à Poto Poto” song) and agreed that the humour was not always picked up.

<sup>28</sup> “Casamance (*an area in Senegal*), which lies between Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, has been gripped by conflict since 1982 when MFDC launched its separatist fight. While the conflict has consisted mostly of low-level fighting it has caused considerable suffering in the population, including 3,000 to 6,000 civilian deaths, 697 mine victims and some 60,000 people displaced, according to the UN and NGO Handicap International” IRIN News June 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84832> .

<sup>29</sup> Abandoned Child

streets by themselves or in gangs. Again they referred to their own experience of seeing Talibés or having heard or read stories about them on the news, or of orphans. But the key theme of recurrence is about the plight of children left to fend for themselves at best or having to do this and also being abused by unscrupulous adults.

One of the girls indicated that *“Here we have too many abandoned children, for instance the talibés, some of them are also abandoned. I know some of them where I live (...) and they are badly treated by the marabouts. Children that hang out in the streets, I like this song because it is a frequent situation in Senegal and I know of it. I particularly like the chorus where the girl sings about the children on the streets that are cold. It is a frequent occurrence here, I even know of a talibé child who died of tuberculosis. It's the same.”*

The choice for the Talibés and the “Enfant abandonné” songs would seem to indicate that people choose the song that is most relevant to them, or that their favourite song is what is perceived by them as “real”. In turn rejected if the feeling is that the song is nothing close to reality, as was the case with the song “Braquage à Poto Poto” as mentioned above. In this case, the favourite song is chosen based on its relevance to the panel’s members’ daily experiences.

During the open discussions following feedback from the exercise, I asked the panelists whether they listened to Rap in their daily lives and why or why not this was the case. This discussion happened to be very revealing and adds to the responses presented above.

Firstly, the boys were very keen to go into depth on the importance of Rap in their lives and why it mattered so much, it is clear that it is *very* important to them. Their animated faces and their strong voices and tones showed real commitment to the music and to the Hip-Hop culture. Their main motivation for their engagement with Rap is that to them Rap is a revolutionary music; it engages and speaks out on taboos and denounces “what is going on”. For instance, one of the older boys said that to him *“Rap music is more revolutionary, it is a music that denounces more the facts of society: denunciation, revolutionary style”* or that Rap is suited to revolution and that other types of music are not; another of the boys said that for him *“Rap is the only revolutionary music, the other*

*kind of music simply aren't suited. Le Mbala sings love, little birds*"<sup>30</sup>.

Rap is also a window onto the world that teaches them, informs them about the world. Again one of the boys indicated that *"we need to understand what we are going through and the Rap artist can help us do this"*. Another added that *"at the same time I discover new things about life through Rap. For instance I found out how black people live in the US. Or what the French are going through in the HLM<sup>31</sup> and banlieues. Here we have false ideas about France. But in fact Rap has helped me discovered what is going on."* Finally, Rap is a voice that they trust because they speak the same language *"its music of youth. Old folks can't decode Rap"*, the Rap artists talk "real", and to these young people the Rap artists are free, unlike other sectors of society. As one of the boys declared, *"I know about things that the authorities do not want us to know, such as what is going on in jails. Same for the mafia. But the journalists don't do it because they are not really free to do their jobs. The Rap artist is in a better situation to do so."* And whether it is Rap or the artists, the influence of the hip-hop culture on how these young boys think is clear. Whilst one respondent was very precise in clarifying that *"I listen to Rap but not to the Rap artists. Some I listen to, others I don't."* another was a lot more impassioned by the topic and said that *"There are some rappers to whom I listen to religiously, they have a large influence on what I think and it is something positive for me. When I want to mess up, it can calm me down. It is a very big influence in my life."* Rap shows the way when one is lost, as the third boy said in rhymes that *"le Rap est de la rue, si tu te perds on te montre les repères"*<sup>32</sup>. Finally, Rap is perceived as a culture. For one of the male respondent, Rap *"is about hip-hop culture, the way one speaks, the clothes, the rapper cannot go unnoticed. It is not only about the music"* and tellingly *"It is the first culture that I have chosen to live as my own and that I was not given"*. The latter might further explain why Rap is so important in the region because it is still perceived as inherently independent from the world of adults in which young people might not always recognize themselves in.

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<sup>30</sup> This is confirmed by Dider Awadi when he places MBala as the song of the Griot, which very much like Rap, uses the art of telling a story to music, but which is far removed when one looks at the content Rap is also a voice to those young people *"The rap artist is the voice, the mirror of the people, they denounce injustice and government. They say what I think"*.

<sup>31</sup> HLM: Habitations à Loyer Modéré: social housing estates where often migrant populations are housed and which are difficult areas to live in, often geographically situated in the outskirts ("banlieues") of large cities.

<sup>32</sup> Rap is of the Streets, if you get lost we will show you the way (left in French in the text because it picked up on a rhyme effect).

Secondly, the discussions were also revealing in the sense that half the panels' respondents do not usually listen to Rap and don't like it very much. There seems to be a gender dimension to the divide amongst respondents as the four boys said they liked Rap whilst the four girls indicated that they didn't<sup>33</sup>. The girls from the panel used valid reasons to explain this split, reasons that even the boys could understand. So I find it is important to present them and further.

The main responses from the girls as to why they might not listen to Rap, is that most of the time they do not understand what is being said because as one respondent put it "*I don't understand the language, boys understand. It is the language from the streets, the language of boys*" whilst another indicated that "*I don't listen to Senegalese Rap, the words are too deep, it's difficult to understand what they are talking about.*" Some indicate that they prefer R&B to Rap "*the rhymes are too fast, there's too much arrogance and I don't like that, I listen to R&B*", yet mention someone like US Lil' Wayne as someone they listen to regularly. Yet Lil' Wayne is definitely a Rap artist. Others indicate that they listen to Rap, but it's American Rap. One female respondent said "*I listen to Rap but American Rap because Senegalese Rappers say stupid things, bad/negative words.*" The relevant finding here is that the girls did not speak enough English to understand the lyrics, so it's the music and the style that took over and potentially the attraction of "what is American"<sup>34</sup>. Rapping in Wolof raises two issues. First language: the girls feel they should understand yet they don't and therefore might feel excluded from the story telling. Second, they understand what is being said but they do not like what is being communicated. The language is of the streets, boy-like and therefore potentially a language that may exclude them.

Indeed, one of the boys could understand this attitude as he explained that in Senegalese culture, the boys played outside on the streets because there was not enough room in the home, yet the girls were kept inside. For the same respondent, the disagreement over Rap

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<sup>33</sup> On a side note, I discussed this split at length with Florence Cissé. She indicated that she felt that this should not be made a generality and that the girls taking part in the panel were not representative of a whole. Their opinions should not be extended to the whole Rap audience as she advised that girls do listen to Rap as well.

<sup>34</sup> Didier Awadi indicated that for him, the type of images and production, more "bling", playing on shiny outfits and decors, bare bodies and sexy dance moves, would be more appealing to young girls than socially and politically conscious Rap with images of angry young men. Florence Cissé also indicated that sometimes US based Rap can appear more glamorous to Rap in Wolof and this might also play in the choice of people over Rap.

in the group's discussion had its roots in the access to the "outside" space and the different cultures that evolve from being able to be on the streets or not<sup>35</sup>. In a West African urban<sup>36</sup> environment, the West African woman stays inside, whilst the man is outside. This should be mitigated though, with the fact that many West African cities are filled with women selling foods and cooking on the streets and this is not a stand point where women might be locked at home with no possibility of going out. However, with Rap in English, the issue of understanding and engaging with what is being said as well as belonging to a male or female sphere disappears. It becomes just another music girls might listen to.

Pushing further on with the gender angle that I felt was arising, I asked the panellists how they felt about girls singing Rap, as AURA includes four female artists. There were two types of reactions from the girls: They either didn't like it because as one respondent explained "*I don't like the fact that they have men-like gestures*". This tended to come out regularly as they focused on what they perceived as "unfeminine attitude" (the giggling and the laughter when miming hand gestures, for instance, were telling of the embarrassment that was felt). Or they liked it because they understood the female artists better than the men's, and therefore felt included as an audience in the story telling. One of the girls indicated that "*They rap well. I understand them better than men*".

For the boys, the majority (2 out of 3 present at the time) felt very positive about female Rap artists. The first respondent indicated that "*I think it's right that women Rap because Rap allows for violent expression*" whilst the other said that "*I appreciate their integration in Rap, they have messages of their own which need to be heard, these are women in the world*". Only one of the boys responded in an ambivalent manner "*I think it's good because it is shared responsibility between women and men. However, Rap as a job is a man's thing so it is a bit difficult to see a woman move or speak like a man. I am quite a traditionalist, so I don't like it very much. But we are also living in modern times... but my daughter, my sister, my mother, they wouldn't do it. But I am also a*

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<sup>35</sup> Didier Awadi confirmed this, and indicated that whether in US based or other forms of Rap, Rap is intrinsically male, and that it is the streets nature of Rap that makes it inherently male.

<sup>36</sup> Didier Awadi emphasized the urban element of this situation as the West African woman is out in the field when the family lives in the country. The process of urbanization, for him, encloses the woman inside.

*democrat.”*

What the first exercise tends to indicate is that for Rap, it is the content that includes or excludes the audience, based on whether the content is close to “real” or can create a link to a lived experience. Responses from both boys and girls show this, specifically their motivation for choosing their favourite songs. Therefore accessibility to the language of Rap is key, yet Rap, to remain “real”, has to rely on a set of codes that takes roots in the streets, a male dominated world. This does not mean that Rap excludes women, but one might want to keep in mind that cultural beliefs and practices colour Rap as much as any other social or cultural activity or products.

Those involved in the Poto Poto project, (Plan and its partner Accents Multiples) seemed to have been aware of this, and tried to address this by including both female Rap artists in the collective, and gender sensitive issues such as rape, forced marriages and prostitution. This effort should really be commended, however social norms take a long time to change and therefore the gender based perceptions around Rap should not be completely dismissed.

**Exercise two**, asked the two groups of respondents to look at the two single music videos.

Therefore each group was asked to watch and comment on “Bienvenue à Poto Poto”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN69QDuW1QE> and “Poto Poto dancing” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMz1G4RHHSM&feature=related> . Both groups were asked to discuss the following questions in group and to feedback to plenary:

- Had you seen the videos before? Where? On which occasion?
- What do the videos say? What is the story being told?
- Do you think these videos are funny, sad, other? Why?

Then in the plenary the questions for discussions were:

- What do these videos make you think of?
- Do you know of similar situations in your lives, or where you live, or through their friends and family? What is the same? What is different?

For this exercise I asked them to change groups from the previous exercise so it wasn't just people knowing each other working together.

The overall trend was similar in both groups. They all knew the videos and had seen them either on TV or during public projections (Plan sponsored events where the videos were played). They all liked the “Bienvenue à Poto Poto” video as representative of African societies, and the various issues linked to children in the region. The feedback from the group discussions to plenary included: “*The video is good and purely African, they denounce African reality and give an image of African unity through the different artists*” and “*in this place there are different people: rich, poor, prostitutes, they denounce poverty that is taking over Africa, the oppression of the rich over the poor*”. It is through this video that the issue of Panafricanism<sup>37</sup> arose. Panafricanism is a theme picked up by Fangafrika as a specific trait of West African Rap. However the “Poto Poto Dancing” song is the cultural product from the project that has created the biggest debate out of the whole day.

When talking about the video, there was common agreement amongst members of the focus group that the Talibé child was tired and fed up and in need of respite, hence the dream to go out and have fun. Group one understood that the child is then chided because he should work for the future of Africa instead of dreaming. Group two said something similar and insisted that the child should be thinking about his own future instead of sleeping/dreaming.

However there are two issues that contributed to quite heated discussions:

- 1) The talibé child: why is he chided by this man at the end of the clip: “arrête de rêver boy, l'avenir de l'Afrique commence par toi!”<sup>38</sup>? One of the respondent noted that “*The child is asphyxiated in the society, he travels somewhere else in*

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<sup>37</sup> “Because it refers neither to a single political ideology nor a clearly discernible philosophical tradition, *Pan-Africanism* is difficult to define. (...). Yet, the concept can be said to signify a set of shared assumptions. Pan-Africanist intellectual, cultural, and political movements tend to view all Africans and descendants of Africans as belonging to a single “race” and sharing cultural unity. Pan-Africanism posits a sense of a shared historical fate for Africans in the Americas, West Indies, and, on the continent itself, has centered on the Atlantic trade in slaves, African slavery, and European imperialism.” New Dictionary of the History of Ideas | 2005 <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Pan-Africanism.aspx>

<sup>38</sup> “Stop dreaming boy, the future of Africa starts with you”

his head, looking for some pleasure and freedom. The man at the end is the greater consciousness and he tells the child his dream does nothing for Africa. But isn't the child the victim? Is this man representing the intelligentsia?" whilst another questioned "Everyone is trying to be distracted, to have fun. The man at the end is saying that there is a challenge ahead. But why push on a talibé child? The talibé child is already deprived of playing, of fun as he must beg. The African is a party person; instead of being at the party, we, young Africans have a challenge to face." Yet for others the cruelty of the situation is striking "The talibé doesn't like who he is, he doesn't like being a talibé, and the nightclub is a place of distraction, an alternative to his life." As another respondent put it "The dream is a dream like we all have everyday. To talk about the future goes hand in hand with being free. He is not free, he cannot think about the future." Finally, the discussion opens to Senegalese society where one respondent noted that "the guy who speaks at the end, he is a representative of Senegalese society who laughs at the talibé instead of helping him" whilst another added "In people's mind there is a place in society for the talibé, he cannot be everywhere. He is given an image of who he is going to be and this is done by society and by religion." To the respondent, this reminded him of a personal anecdote where as a worker in Dakar's zoo, he was faced with talibé children trying to enter the zoo and he shouted at them "what are you doing here?". What he was saying was that in people's mind, talibé children are not to be seen having fun, they are stuck in the picture of the begging child.

- 2) The presentation of the party: the party is perceived (bar one person) negatively by the majority "The party: very much a Poto Poto party: the place is shabby, it is not rich. It fits with Poto Poto". It is viewed as a place of debauchery, a place they certainly would not go to. As one respondent put it "I don't go to these parties. I know of these parties where there is perversion." What those two responses indicate is that, to the members of the panel, this Poto Poto nightclub is perceived as "real" by the members of the panel, as something recognizable and that they know. Yet, what their comments may indicate here is that it is not real to *their* reality, but to the reality of the Poto Poto children. This emphasis on a party that

fits with Poto Poto as mentioned above, may indicate that they remain outside from Poto Poto and that they do not see themselves part of the same world<sup>39</sup>.

On a more reflective note, their comments came across as rather conservative, mostly on how they perceived the use of alcohol or drugs and I had not seen the video in the same light as them at all, having found many parts of it rather funny. This shows how the cultural context or understanding is essential to reading and understanding an audience's behaviour. It is my own perception of Rap culture that has led me to read this product in such a way. Referring to the quotes above, words like "perversion" seem to indicate quite a strong moral judgment on activities around alcohol, drugs or sex suggested in the video. One respondent refers to the Poto Poto nightclub as a "*dirty world*" and he tells us to "*remember that Poto Poto means mud.*" In short, it is because Poto Poto children live wretched lives that they attend wretched parties. The majority of respondents indicated that the video adequately represented what a party would be like in Poto Poto as another respondent said "*this video shows the true face of Poto Poto*" and "*AURA has been successful with this video in being real for Poto Poto.*" Another respondent goes further into social commentary and adds that "*the Poto Poto party is the consequence of children's oppression*". However the reference to "*being real for Poto Poto*" is certainly not attractive, and the majority (bar one) clearly indicated that they would not go to such parties.

Although the panel showed signs of tiredness, we moved on to (final) **exercise three**.

The audience panel was shown a 30 minutes documentary which included a small extract of the live performance. I will describe the documentary briefly so as to contextualize the responses from the members of the focus group and ensure clarity when we later make references to the various parts of the documentary.

The documentary starts with a comedy sketch that was beamed at the start of the concert. The Poto Poto police station receives a call from an imaginary Ministry of the Interior to catch the youth from Poto Poto. All the policemen in the sketch are inept, and most pass

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<sup>39</sup> Didier Awadi explained that indeed it was a typical Poto Poto party with the problem of Poto Poto put in context, but also the proof that these young people also have fun, despite it all

the buck onto lower graded police officers to do the job. Finally two police officers (acted by two famous West African comedians) go in disguise in Poto Poto. They start running after the various characters of the Poto Poto album. It is like a Marx Brother comedy and as the characters are running away from the police, the live fleshed artists enter the stage as if running straight out of the screen. And they start singing and dancing and acting to the songs from the album, whilst pictures about children are beamed at the back throughout the concert. The DVD was shown to the whole group in order for them to communicate their views afterwards. The video was filmed from afar and not of great quality and we could only show it on a computer screen and not a large screen as originally planned.

The discussions, although less intense, prompted interesting findings. For instance, “Braquage à Poto Poto” which had gathered quite a lot of negative feedback during the morning discussions, got some more positive comments. One panel member said that “*It is well illustrated, this is how I had imagined it, it is actually quite funny*” whilst another indicated that “*For ‘Braquage’ there is a movie where two Americans got held up and the movie showed the same thing as the concert, so now it kind of looks more real*”. It is interesting though to see that it becomes more real because it looks like a movie! On the whole the panel felt very positive at the documentary “*I found the concept very touching, the concert shows how painful life is in Poto Poto, the pictures beamed at the back are actually quite sad*”. One respondent was especially complimentary to the artists “*Congratulations to the artists, they really gave of themselves. They played the game by dressing up so modestly and life-like. The voices, the attitudes, everything was perfect*”. The last quote refers to the audience describing Rap artists generally being very cautious and careful about their image, a key symbol in Rap on how to present yourself.

The point of Poto Poto is all about being poor and it seems that the artists were able to present themselves as credible characters of Poto Poto. Florence Cissé indicated that it was probably the clothes and the accessories that were the most recognizable symbols to create understanding on who those kids from Poto Poto were.

Finally I asked them whether they would pay to see such a show. The reason I asked this is because the live performances were free and so it is easier for the organizers to gather large crowds. To me, paying for a show means that there is also a financial investment from the audience which may indicate the level of desire from the audience to see the show. Having spent the day on the project I thought that this question might reveal the level of interest that the products we had seen could have fostered amongst the audience. As an added indicator of quality to the cultural products and the level of pleasure they might have fostered. They answered that they would, because they would be able to see them (the artists) better on the stage, to be able to see them live in the flesh, the live element creating the desire and excitement.

The findings from the panel show that there is an evolution of the relation towards Poto Poto as the members of the focus group are shown different types of products. As this last exercise reveals, with each level of encountering (listening to the songs, watching the videos and then the concert) a new understanding or comprehension arose, each “cultural” product complementing one another and reinforcing the understanding of what life in Poto Poto is like for young people. As well as producing different levels of connection through the experience of pleasure, the greatest coming from seeing the live show documentary (which brings it all: sound, music, images and drama).

## **Discussion of results**

### ***A reflection on working with audiences***

Originally I did not intend to include gender as such a large part of the project work, however I chose to let myself be carried by the discoveries that I was going to find during this encounter with the members of the panel. The outcome is described in the above section and it leads me to argue that there is a dimension around gender, audiences and Rap that is rarely addressed. I was intrigued that this arose, but as defined in the methodology section of this research report, this discovery allowed for more in-depth exploration of potential audience connection to media texts.

Rap is often read as sexist or violent to women when analysed through the eyes of gender. This is undeniably true of many Rap products, yet, in the context of West Africa,

I believe that Rap can be very much an aperture to many females if not feminism, demands and debates. This is because the local Rap scene is rooted in political and social environments, as revealed by the interviews of the female Rap artists (available in the Fangafrika documentary) from the region, some of whom are part of the AURA collective.

Unfortunately, there is little literature on female Rap artists and what I have found focuses on the US female Rap scene and is not exactly relevant to West Africa. However findings could indicate that Rap is intrinsically gender biased because of its inherent nature (being born and growing out of the streets) and because of the fact that women and girls remain outside of this realm. Poto Poto and AURA are addressing this issue in indirect ways by incorporating female artists amongst extremely well-known and popular local male artists.

However, whilst women Rap artists can help bridge the gap with the world of the “boys” and the streets by rapping in a manner and on subjects that are relevant to girls, there is one issue that one must be taken into account.

The findings tend to show that presumptions around femininity and adequate female behaviour lie as much if not more in girls than in boys. This, in a way, is reiterated by Priss K in the Fangafrika’s documentary when she talks frankly about the passive attitude of Ivorian women, waiting to marry someone wealthy to better their own perspectives in life, and indicating that they are more concerned about perceived traditional questions of attractiveness and endearing femininity.

This is of course only one perspective amongst many. It may indicate though that Rap female artists are always confronted with the gender stereotypes projected on to them, which are difficult to reconcile with the Rap codes they embrace to enter the Rap scene. In that uncomfortable space of expectation on one hand, and of codes on the other, a gap is created. Findings from the focus group may indicate that this “gap” is then projected back to the audience, some whom might feel uncomfortable at women engaging in codes which are perceived as unwomanly.

Therefore engagement from a mostly female audience in this difficult situation of having to confront society's expectations with codes that may be linked strongly to gender identities may not be easy to predict for anyone engineering such a project in the future. If such a gap exists, then it needs to be acknowledged and potential consequences need to be analysed and incorporated. As Andy Ruddock indicates: "we need to know why people are offended, hurt or entertained by media content (...)." (Ruddock, 2007, p102).

In the context of this project, what the latter is extremely useful in revealing, is that there might have been a gap in understanding youth as an audience. The Poto Poto project aimed to reach 3.5 million "youths between the ages 15 – 25, from mixed backgrounds, 50% girls/ 50% boys, urban and peri-urban". Far too large and pretty much undefined, this reference seems to indicate that there was at the time, a lack of understanding within Plan and potentially its partners including AURA, of how audiences work and the way that they might respond to, engaging a) with cultural products generally and b) with cultural products developed with the clear aim of engaging audiences with issues of social and political change.

Therefore one might be able to deduct that launching a politically and socially conscious Rap album promoting the rights of the child will probably not reach and engage "50% girls/ 50% boys, urban and peri-urban". It will probably not reach even half of the 50% of girls. It might also play to existing beliefs around gender roles and stereotypes.

However more than a question of audience segmenting, what these findings might indicate is a general tendency to talk about youth audiences as an amorphous group without the recognition of the underlying codes and symbols that separate "youth" into various tribes, those codes that allow them to recognize each other and define where they belong and how, and the values that derive from that. This discussion does not aim to go deep into those different tribes and symbols, but to remain a reflection on audience research. Yet questions remain as who are these youths the project tried to reach, and how the organisations involved are able to use their knowledge about the targeted audiences to effectively respond to the needs of their audiences.

What findings may also indicate is that while as project planners, or otherwise as evaluators, we might have an audience in mind, we might not be fully aware of a) who the audience is or b) of all the other audiences we might be reaching and not have thought of. We might have a clear idea of what audience *we* want to address, yet we do not have control over *all* the audience we actually reach through the media texts produced. As explained by Ruddock, audiences are part of a cultural environment. These audiences might not have as much control over what they hear, read or see as they think. Communication professionals might not have as much control over what audiences read, hear or see as they think. Consequently, even if you don't like Rap, it is part of the cultural environment and you might still be influenced by it (Ruddock, 2007, p28).

It could be contested that this is particularly true with Poto Poto. Responses to the questionnaire shows that even amongst those who might not like Rap in Wolof, they were aware of AURA and of at least two singles from the Poto Poto album. Although connection to the media text is most effective through "jouissance", the findings from the focus group, and especially from the girls in their relation to Rap and all that the discussion brought up, could indicate that there is engagement with the media text, whether there is pleasure or not produced.

What these reflections around working with audiences lead me to argue is that:

- Communication for development specialists need to remain conscious of the cultural and social frames and the depth of those and how they might counteract with what is expected to achieve over the long term.
- Communication for development specialists need to remain humble in their ideas of how much they are able to target audiences and control that targeting, and acknowledge that there might be an awful lot of "unintended" audiences out there, incorporating messages, reclaiming them, interpreting them, for better or for worse.

## ***Putting analysis and discussion into perspective***

### **Rap, learning and beliefs**

The findings seem to indicate that Rap is perceived as an art form which helps young people discover, understand “*we need to understand what we are going through and the Rap artist can help us do this*”, and make their minds up about the wider world.

When members of the panel were asked whether they listened to Rap and why, one of the key reasons was that Rap helped them learn about the world: “*at the same time I discover new things about life through Rap. For instance I found out how black people live in the US. Or what the French are going through in the HLM<sup>40</sup> and banlieues. Here we have false ideas about France. But in fact Rap has helped me discovered what is going on.*”

The reason for this could be because Rap artists are perceived as reliable sources of information, more reliable than news sources: “*Rap has helped me discovered what is going on*” and “*I know about things that the authorities do not want us to know, such as what is going on in jails. Same for the mafia. But the journalists don't do it because they are not really free to do their jobs. The Rap artist is in a better situation to do so.*”

This would tend to support Ellis’ point, (in Ruddock, 2007, p61) that news is replaced by fictional media when it comes to audiences strengthening their understanding of the political world.

Findings could insinuate that something similar is happening with Rap and its audience, where audiences perceive Rap artists as more reliable sources than news journalist because of their perceived independence through their anchorage in what is “real” (they know “*what is going on*”). Consequently, findings seem to indicate that Rap artists are perceived to have access to the kind of knowledge only open to them and not to journalists, who “*are not really free to do their jobs*”. Therefore it could be that it is the authority placed on it by the audience that turns Rap into a tool of social critique and influence.

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<sup>40</sup> HLM: Habitations à Loyer Modéré: social housing estates where often migrant populations are housed and which are difficult areas to live in, often geographically situated in the outskirts (“banlieues”) of large cities.

Findings around gender stereotyping for example, would also tend to support that audiences might not change their minds around strongly held beliefs, and that therefore potential for influence may be restricted to existing held beliefs. Strongly held beliefs play a strong role in the interpretation of the media text, for instance if we refer to the moral judgment around the Poto Poto party.

I believe, that findings could indicate that the multiple media formats used in the Poto Poto project (album, video, live performances), have potentially been useful in attracting audiences which might have been reluctant to engage with Rap in the first place. The findings could suggest that even amongst the panel members who are not keen on African Rap, all felt positive at end of day about Poto Poto. It was either the short funny film beamed before the live show, the desire for experiencing “seeing the artists in the flesh”, or the photos beamed during the show, the lyrics of the songs, and the positivity of one of the video singles, which has a lasting effect on one or the other of the panel members.

In this sense, Poto Poto could prove to be a model in how to gather audiences and engage them in learning a “story concept”. Indeed the multiple level of album, videos, show plus short comedy film, putting “flesh” to the characters and illustrating in many formats the story line of the lives of the children of Poto Poto, means that even those who are not keen on Rap and might feel excluded by the songs, are “caught” by the other cultural products.

### **Poto Poto: Rap as a tool for praxis?**

With regards to engaging audiences and processes of learning, Stroenke’s Bongo Flava, (2005) as indicated above, suggests that Rap is specifically relevant as a tool for engagement because of its capacity to use reality and pragmatism, avoiding both blame and resolution. In passing, having to refer to Rap in East Africa as research literature for this project shows just how little analysis there is around Rap in the region, whilst there is an abundance of literature on the subject of Rap and youth in North America, perhaps something to reflect on.

Stroenke's theory (2005) is reinforced by Andy Ruddock's (2007) take on the need for authenticity in media text to be effective in the elaboration of messages. With Poto Poto, the research findings tend to support Stroenke and Ruddock's proposition that the project has an impact because it talks about real events in believable terms, from the Talibé song, to the Poto Poto Party video.

The latter is real enough to be described as a typical Poto Poto party by the panel and for that specific reason, is something really unattractive to the panel. As Stroenke notes quite wryly as an academic himself, "A rapper listing possibly valid reasons for being hopeful amid surrounding misery may earn credit from the academic world. To hip-hop fans (popular culture being more demanding than academics), his or her list will more probably sound pathetic, if not sarcastic" (Stroenke, 2005, p 491). In that sense therefore Poto Poto has been successful in addressing youth because it has tightly walked the rope between denouncing child abuses and remaining relevant.

However the findings from the research would tend to indicate that denouncing child abuse does not lead automatically to awareness about child rights, let alone engaging youth on a discussion on how to change this. As defined by Lemish and Scholte, "Praxis is defined (...), as actions conducted through understanding and moral judgment" (Lemish & Scholte, 2009, p198). It is true that lack of time meant that members of the panel did not go near exploring Lemish and Scholte's definition of praxis because no questions were asked on this. So what the findings might indicate is that a denunciation of abuse does not automatically create social engagement. The latter probably requires a space for the elaboration of praxis, a space which could be engendered by civil society organisations which are held to a different set of codes than the artists and who might be best placed to open the space for reflection and action.

However the findings indicate that the panel members engaged in some level of praxis in any case. Indeed they felt moved by the stories and feelings of sadness, anger, repulsion and compassion were often mentioned, there was some level of praxis shown in discussions around the "Poto Poto Dancing" video, where society and moral attitude to

the child as well as the moral attitude of the party goers were discussed and analysed at length.

Similar discussions on whether the situation of the talibés or orphaned children were humane in any way were also extensive and these demonstrated a good understanding not only of the historical context, but also of the structural issues such as poverty and ignorance which led to the situation of abuse. They also were able to read the conflict between the official discourse on the situation (such as the religious discourse which justifies talibés) and the reality of abuse these children undergo daily, often to fulfill the thirst for profits from some (but not all) religious leaders who lead talibé schools.

Therefore, findings would tend to indicate that some of the criteria for praxis, as defined by Lemish and Scholte, were achieved in the discussions between the members of the panel, even if no one spoke specifically of child rights (apart from one respondent who has known Plan for years and already knew about child rights).

What the findings for this research may show is that Poto Poto and consequently Rap could be a mechanism to describe and denounce a specific reality and to channel the feelings of many young people (possibly a majority of them being men, as discussed above). It is also able to engage its audience sufficiently to trigger reflection around some of the contextual and structural issues that foster the “reality” and emphasize the conflicts inherent to West African societies.

Findings may indicate that Rap is able to do all of the above to some extent because of its capacity to be real whilst not being “preachy”. Yet it is also possible that it is those same qualities which injure the effort to pass on solution or action oriented messages. Indeed, to remain “real” and credible, Rap cannot imply that it knows or is willing to provide an answer or it risks losing its audience. Therefore one might consider that Stroenke’s point (2005) reaches a limit when Rap and Rap artists partner with a development organisation. CSOs are not just agent of social critique but perceive themselves as actors of social change. They do not just denounce, they also make propositions. Plan’s agenda is the promotion of child rights to ensure the welfare of the child, its action ensures that these

rights are respected from community to national level by working for the rights of the child to be incorporated and implemented in national policies. If Rap has to stay away from engaging in the debate which deals with responsibilities and recommendations, then how do you move from denouncing child abuse to mobilizing young people to ask for their rights?

## **Conclusion**

Because of the very small sample that I put together for this research project, my findings cannot be assumed to be representative of a wide audience, and therefore they should be taken with caution. Yet they might be useful in indicating some potential learning for similar projects in the future. They also might present opportunities for further research around audiences.

With regards to the questions this research tried to address the findings tend to indicate the following:

- To the question “How does the audience read or understand the Poto Poto songs available in the album, and the visuals (lyrics and visuals such as video-clips of the songs, album cover, website and recorded footages from the live concerts)?” The members of the panel were particularly sensitive to the lyrics and the story telling elements of the album. It is the songs with the most relevance to their daily experiences which they tended to prefer. The songs were able to trigger a variety of emotions and feelings, ranging from sadness, repulsion to laughter. I argue that this range of emotions created a certain level of connection and fostered some level of praxis.

The multi-media format of the Poto Poto project also facilitated the creation of various entry points to engage a different range of audiences. Indeed, for those who would not automatically listen to Rap, videos and live performances and specifically theatre-like performance were attractive ways to connect with the project. Therefore similar communication programmes in the future could well learn from this experience and push

for the multi-layered, multi-output approaches that Poto Poto was able to do so successfully.

- To the question “How do they engage with the issues raised, when confronted to the album, in discussions with other young people from the project’s target audience?”

The findings may support Ruddock’s idea that audiences’ existing beliefs colour their interpretation of the media message. Discussions around gender and Rap, or some of the rather conservative comments about the Poto Poto Dancing video, could credit the idea that audiences tend to focus on the elements that might relate to their existing beliefs whilst ignoring other elements of the message. Hence what the findings may tell us is that such projects may need to incorporate a good understanding of how audiences work, and this not just from a perspective of audience segmentation. Audience analysis needs to take place at the start of the project. This analysis needs to provide understanding of the audience’s existing beliefs so as to elaborate media messages which connect in some form or other to the audience’s capacity for absorbing these messages.

It could be more effective to tailor messages that remain within the sphere, or close to the boundaries of the audience’s existing beliefs so as to be able to connect with them and to ignite a process of engagement. This leads me to suggest that further studies on how CSOs think of youth as an audience and consequently build communication programmes might be useful to the Com4Dev sector.

Finally, the findings also tend to show that communication for social change professionals have to keep in mind that the influence process between media texts and messages is a complex one. In reality, there seems to be some room for accessing and controlling messages to audiences and that individual interpretation is not always predictable or controllable.

- To the question “What, if anything, is specific about Rap as a music genre in engaging youth in West Africa on issues of social justice?” The findings tend to support the idea that Rap’s actualities lies in its capacity to appeal to audiences because of its capacity to be connected to what is “real”.

Therefore it was a wise choice for Plan to favour Rap as a way to connect with its audience. Consequently, findings could also show that Rap's constitution creates its own limitations to engaging youth audiences with social change. Further studies around the issue of audience's relationships to gender, Rap and the feminist agenda in the region, could be really useful in addressing this issue of exclusion and further inform on how to address young girls as an audience in future communication programming.

Additionally, the limits of Rap lie in the fact that it cannot engage beyond social critique to move to social change, as its credibility lies in the fact that it cannot provide suggestions or solutions for a way forward. This leads us to reflect on the nature of partnership projects such as Poto Poto, and suggests that more research, on the opportunities and challenges such partnerships may create, be undertaken in the future.

There is a clear assumption that Rap in West Africa is about social and political struggle, which artists see themselves as the spokespersons of the omitted, as indicated in Fangafrika. This was not only reasserted during my interview with Didier Awadi, but also in the findings from the focus groups. It is on the elaboration of the struggles young people experience that Rap builds its legitimacy. This could indicate that Rap is one way at least for youths to start expressing their voice, despair and anger. Poignantly, Rap is the representation of a modern Africa anchored in political and social struggle, during a rapid process of modernization and urbanization of which the majority of young people feel excluded from. To me West African Rap is one more facet which shows how many in the region have embraced change since independence, fifty years ago. Rap represents the political and social consciousness of the "here and now" of many more people than the educated few of the elite, that made the majority of the heroes of the independence. After conducting this research project, I believe that Rap is an artistic form in *itself*, and by its nature, one very appropriate to much of Africa's youth right now.

**102,125 signs, no space.**

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## **Annexes**

### ***Annex 1: Questionnaire distributed to focus group in September 2010 in Dakar, Senegal:***

#### **Questionnaire to youth before focus groups**

Aim: finding out the general knowledge about Poto Poto before starting the audience research:

Do you know AURA?

Yes/No

Who do you know in AURA? (i.e. which are the rap artists you know best):

How did you hear about AURA (radio, concerts, video, school visit, youth magazine, other?)?

Which songs of AURA's album : "Les histoires extraordinaire de Poto Poto" have you heard:

[Bienvenue à Poto-Poto](#) –

[Talibé](#) –

[Poto Poto Dancing](#) –

[Mamadi](#) –

[Fous le Bordel](#) –

[You Shouda Know](#) –

[Enfant Soldat](#) –

[Braquage à Poto Poto](#) –

[La Promenade](#) –

[L'enfant abandonné](#) –

[Life in Poto Poto](#) –

[Jay Xale Yi](#)

What do you think is the Poto Poto album about? Why?

Which song do you like best?

Why?

## ***Annex 2: Full transcript from focus groups discussions, September 2010, Dakar, Senegal***

8 people (or 7 + 1 who arrived later), 4 boys and 4 girls, aged 15-24. 3 girls (youngest) knew each other, 3 boys and one girl knew each other and the last guy to arrive knew one girl from the previous group.

**Exercise 1:** two groups listened to 6 songs from the album Poto Poto, that were selected based on language (French and Wolof, one contained some English but the older boys all spoke English). The songs were:

Group 1: *Enfant soldat*, *Braquage à Poto Poto*, *Talibe*

Group 2: *Jay Xale Yi*, *la Promenade*, *l'enfant abandonne*

The groups were asked to listen to the songs and to reflect on the following questions:

Which song do you prefer? Why?

What meaning do the songs hold? What do they try and say?

For each of the songs what feeling do you have and why?

The groups would then feedback to plenary and additional questions were asked in plenary, including: what do you think these situations are like? What did you agree on and why? What didn't you agree on? What do you think of Rap? Do you listen to it? What other music do you listen to? What's different?

Groupe 1:

Question: which song do you prefer and why?: 3 out of 4 chose *Talibe*. Because the song denounces the work that the Talibes are forced to do, a work that serves as pretext for education which is in fact just begging. It is a song that denounces. The song is also melodious, so it is not just the content but also the form. The music is sad.

1 person chose: *Enfant Soldat*: to use a child as a soldier is to turn him into an animal.

Question 2: What is the meaning of the song: Denunciation of the conditions that the Talibes and *Enfant Soldat* is about description of the life of a child soldier, denunciation and prevention.

What are the songs trying to say:

- that education is being to get the kid to beg on the streets, it's try to legitimise begging
- the child is made to believe that he is fighting for his freedom when in fact he is doing so for other motives.

Your feelings about the songs:

*Talibe*: compassion, pity, sadness, it is not natural to get an innocent child to beg.

- It is sad and melodious. I am a musician and I like sad or melodious songs.

*Enfant soldat*: desolation, sadness. At this age, the child should be going to school instead of making war.

*Braquage à Poto Poto*: desolation, anger, injustice: it's inhuman; it is a coward thing to do to hold people up. We feel indignant.

- the song is over the top. Here in Senegal I have never heard that such thing has

- happened. We have pickpockets but we don't have hold ups. May be in other African countries, for some of the other artists in the collective who experience other situations
- The idea of holding up is an idea I don't like. It is not something we have in Senegal. *I asked: but you don't have child soldiers either?* We don't have child soldiers here but in other countries we experience it, particularly in Africa.
  - We denounce the work of children, it is not right to make children work. We know the talibes, they come to our houses, my aunt is a god mother to many. They come to my house and they use clothes, our showers, etc.
  - Braquage à poto poto: for me it is braquage a Casamance , for me all the songs were relevant. Although I am not from Casamance, I know of travelers who have told me that hold ups happen all the time. For me the choice between the 3 songs was very difficult.

#### Groupe 2:

Jay (should be Jaa) Xale Yi: Marchander/ Vendre/ to bargain, to sell

Favourite song: Abandoned Children: unanimity: denounces a fact in society and many organisations fight against this violence.

Meaning of the song: it is about education for abandoned children. Street children live in misery, they learn to steal and to rob. Here we have too many abandoned children, for instance the talibes, some of them are also abandoned. I know some of them where I live in Saint Louis and they are badly treated by the marabouts. Children that hang out in the streets, I like this song because it is a frequent situation in Senegal and I know of it. I particularly like the chorus where the girl sings about the children on the streets that are cold. It is a frequent occurrence here, I even know of a talibe child who has died of tuberculosis. It's the same. There are parents who instead of giving up children at an orphanage, they kill them.

Sentiments: Sadness because one wonders whether their parents are conscious of what they have done or if themselves went through something similar.

Jay Xale Yi: l'histoire d'un enfant abandonne, pas d'affection ou de tendresse. He lives like a slave, he is a domestic worker who was sold on by his family. Feeling of sadness and pity.

La promenade: feeling of freedom, a young man free of what he wants to do, he encourages his friends, argues with them.

Open plenary discussion: Who listens to Rap (3 out 7 said yes, all guys). Why?

- 3) I am a rapper but I listen to all kind of music because I am a musician. It is for my own musical culture. Rap specifically I have known since being a child. Rap music is more revolutionary, it is a music that denounces more the facts of society: denunciation, revolutionary style. It is about hiphop culture, the way one speaks, the clothes, the rapper cannot go unnoticed. It is not only about the music. It is the first culture that I have chosen to live as my own and that I was not given. I really liked the texts. There are some rappers to whom I listen to religiously, they have a large influence on what I think and it is something positive for me. When I want to mess up, it can calm me down. It is a very big influence in my life.
- 4) I am a radio DJ, I listen to all music. There is one rap artist who says that rap is the "...” de la rue, si tu te perds on te montre les repères”. It is out on the streets

that we play because there is no room in the house. Rap is the only revolutionary music, the other kind of music simply aren't suited. Le Mbala sing love, little birds, whilst we need to understand what we are going through and the rap artist can help us do this. The kind of writing is important, the texts are studied at university (Slam). It really moves us.

- 5) I listen to rap but not to the rap artists. Some I listen to others I don't. Rappers are revolutionaries, it's music of youth. Old folks can't decode rap.
- 6) The rap artist is the voice, the mirror of the people, they denounce injustice and government. They say what I think and at the same time I discover new things about life through Rap. For instance I found out how black people live in the US. Or what the French are going through in the HLM and banlieues. Here we have false ideas about France. But in fact Rap has helped me discovered what is going on. I know about things that the authorities do not want us to know, such as what is going on in jails. Same for the mafia. But the journalists don't do it because they are not really free to do their jobs. The rap artist is in a better situation to do so.

Is Rap a music for the boys then?

- I listen to Rap but American rap because Senegalese Rappers say stupid things, bad/negative words.
- I don't listen to Senegalese rap, the words are too deep, it's difficult to understand what they are talking about. I listen to R&B.
- The rhymes are too fast, there's too much arrogance and I don't like that.
- I have too many difficulties to understand what they say.
- I don't understand the language, boys understand.
- It is the language from the streets, the language of boys. The girls are inside the house.
- I listen to R&B, it's different to Rap, for instance Lil Wayne. I prefer American Rap

So what about female rap artists then/: girls

- It's their job I guess, but I don't like it. I don't like the fact that they have men-like gestures.
- Elles font bien le rap, I understand them better than men.

Boys:

- 4) I think it's good because it is shared responsibility between women and men. However rap as a job is a man's thing so it is a bit difficult to see a woman move or speak like a man. I am quite a traditionalist, so I don't like it very much. But we are also living in modern times... but my daughter, my sister, my mother, they wouldn't do it. But I am also a democrat.
- 5) I think it's right that women do Rap because Rap allows for violent expression. In Senegal not everyone sees the difference between rap and r&b, the 2 are part of the hiphop culture but they are different.
- 6) I appreciate their integration in Rap, they have messages of their own and that need to be heard, these are women in the world.
- 7) Brothers in rap, they are revolutionaries, it's like in politics or literature.

## **Exercise 2: Music videos: Bienvenue a Poto Poto and Poto Poto Dancing**

questions to discuss in groups: the groups changed from the previous exercise, I asked for them to mix so it wasn't just people knowing each other speaking. Also for elders to engage younger kids where in the previous group I had felt that one girl had kind of taken the lead.

had they seen the videos before? Where? On which occasion?

What do the videos say? What is the story being told?

Do you think these videos are funny, sad, other? Why?

Questions for plenary discussions:

- what do these videos make you think of? Do they know of similar situations in their lives, or where they live, or through their friends and family? What is the same? What is different?

Group 1:

question 1: they have seen the videos on tv at home and during public projections

question 2: Poto Poto Dancing: the Talibe is tired and he wants to party. The desperate hide their despair in alcohol, prostitutes, the authorities forget their responsibilities as too busy partying, the rich show off their wealth, drunkards. And the lie of this dream the talibe is reminded about his role in the future of Africa.

The song exemplifies life in a night club.

Bienvenue a Poto Poto: the video shows a place where people are free to speak, in this place there are different people: rich, poor, prostitutes, they denounce poverty that is taking over Africa, the oppression of the rich over the poor. The video is good and purely African, they denounce African reality and give an image of African unity through the different artists.

Group 2:

question 1: had seen the videos on tv at home

question 2: Bienvenue à Poto Poto: the song talks about society's taboos, for instance, prostitution, forced marriage, begging, poverty. The video shown a mini picture of African society.

Poto poto dancing: the song talks about a party. The video shows the dream of a talibe: he can see himself party with his friends from Poto Poto.

Our opinion: based on how they dressed up, we see that the artists have interpreted their parts really well.

Poto Poto Dancing; the Talibe child is so tired he lies down, he dreams of having a party. The video is about the everyday Senegalese who dreams about great things and does nothing. Someone comes to wake him up. But in the dream the guy is already tired; it paradoxical because someone who needs help is being asked to give help. It is not to this child that one should be asking to move for Africa. I think they (the artists) tried to tell Africa to wake up but they got it wrong.

- in the video at the beginning we can hear pop music on the radio and the muezzin calling for prayer at the same time. The child is victim of the religion and he falls into something else because his despair comes from religion.. There are fruits he can't touch behind him and out of disgust he throws his begging pot. It is a video, it can't say it all. The video says that you should not fall into the nightclub dream, but in the future of Africa.
- The child is asphyxiated in the society, he travels somewhere else in his head,

- looking for some pleasure and freedom. The man at the end is the greater conscious in him the child's dream does nothing for Africa. But isn't the child the victim? Is this man representing the intelligentsia?
- Party: everyone is trying to be distracted, to have fun. The man at the end is saying that there is a challenge ahead. But why push on a talibe child? Talibe child is already deprived of playing, of fun as he must beg. The African is a party person; instead of being at the party, we, young Africans have a challenge to face.
  - The talibe child is in total despair and in my opinion he should be dreaming about something else, think about his own future. A talibe child should not dream he should think about his own future.
  - The talibe child is in despair, he wants to daydream, to think about something else. He has a dream but he should think about his future, think about what he will do.
  - The talibe doesn't like who he is, he doesn't like being a talibe, the club is a place of distraction, an alternative to his life.
  - The dream is a dream like we all have everyday. To talk about the future goes hand in hand with being free. He is not free he cannot think about the future.
  - In people's mind there is a place in sty for the talibe, he cannot be everywhere. He is given an image of who he is going to be and this is done by society and by religion. The child sees that with alcohol one can have fun. The rich guy is not at peace; the bar exemplifies a kind of society that runs away from life. Normal people do not do this but they are not shown here. Poto Poto is the consequence of children's oppression.
  - Freud: a repressed desire, for instance through religion, the child will want to express his desire. The dream is not voluntary, it is his impulses that throw him in this dirty world. Remember that Poto Poto means mud.
  - The party: very much a Poto Poto party: the place is shabby, it is not rich. It fits with Poto Poto, but I don't go to these parties. I know of these parties where there is perversion. Through Rap you can show this side of things, but it is not specifically rap.
  - The party is crap
  - the party is beautiful and it is a beautiful party. Everyone feels at ease and feels free, they are dancing well. They are satisfied and if one goes to a party it is exactly for this reason.
  - It has some funny elements
  - it is very much a Poto Poto party
  - this video shows the true face of Poto Poto. The actors: they are a consequence of a past life. I don't feel like going to this party.
  - The talibe child would have heard of such parties and to forbid him from going is to in fact provoke him. And this is where the trauma lies.
  - AURA has been successful with this video in being real for Poto Poto.
  - The guy who speaks at the end, he is a representative of Senegalese society who laughs at the talibe instead of helping him.
  - Sadness, pity, pain.
- Bienvenue a poto pto:
- all social classes
  - all jobs are represented there and this is how it is the African society in small.
  - The video was filmed at Fass market in Dakar

- the market is the meeting place for everyone, everyday, all social classes.
- Fass has a bit of a Poto Poto-like market
- it is a presentation video, the old man in the end turns to the audience and in his eyes say: have you seen what is going on?
- I liked it because it is not about any Senegalese Jo Smith but about any African Jo Smith, and it is that African that we are showing.
- The character played by Big D is not born rich, he is a dealer. He lives in Poto Poto because it is the place where he can sell.
- They only show us this kind of Africa.

**Exercise 3: Concert: the audience was shown a 30 minutes snippet of the live**

performance. It starts with a comedy sketch that was beamed at the start of the concert: the police station in Poto Poto receives a call from the temporary ministry of the interior to catch the youth from Poto Poto. All the policemen are inept. 2 of them will go in disguise in Poto Poto and start running after the various characters of Poto Poto album. It is like a Marx Brother comedy and as the youth is running around away from the police, the live fleshed artists enter the stage as if running straight out of the screen. And they start singing and dancing and acting to the songs from the album. The DVD was shown to the whole group to gather views afterwards. The video was filmed from afar and not of great quality and we could only show it on a computer screen and not a large screen as originally planned. The audience was also quite tired. Ideally, I wanted to show this on a second day as I was anticipating that this had been quite a long day already.

Unfortunately I could not get a second day.

Plenary discussions:

- they have managed to illustrate the songs very well
- the song Braquage: it is well illustrated, this is how I had imagined it, it is actually quite funny. But it is in the middle of town, may be in Casamance it's like that, but not in town.
- I found the concept very touching, the concert shows how painful life is in Poto Poto, the pictures beamed at the back are actually quite sad.
- For "Braquage" there is a movie where 2 Americans got held up and the movie showed the same thing as the concert, so now it kind of looks more real.
- Congrats to the artists, they really gave of themselves. They played the game by dressing up so modestly and life-like. The voices, the attitudes, all was perfect.
- Quite interesting, they acted the songs out really well.
- When asked whether they would pay to see such a show, the answer was yes. When asked why: to be able to see them better on the stage, to be able to see them live in the flesh. Some knew people who had gone. They liked the way it had been staged. They liked the introductory sketches.

***Annex 3: Full transcript of Skype interview with Plan Project Coordinator, Florence Cissé***

Florence Cissé, Plan WARO office,  
Regional media assistant, Communications Department,

Florence managed the Poto Poto project with AURA and Accents multiples : Was responsible for administrative follow up and project management with Executive Producers Accents Multiples in 7 countries for the project.

MH: Main audience for the project: children. How do you define children (age range)?

FC: We consider all person under the age of 18 to be children, if we refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our projects, depending on our own objectives, and depending on the targets we will end up segmenting. When we look at the Poto Poto project, we are talking about children and youths, as we were going to the age of 18 and above, as realities in Africa are such that children of 18 or more are still the responsibility of parents; because of the various reasons that we know already.

MH: Why is that (prompt to develop)?

FC: The reasons are linked to economic reasons. Contrarily to European countries where an 18 year old can may be leave the parental home, because he already has a qualification and works, or there are state structures that are which help young people to move forward, this system is nigh-on inexistent in Africa. All this, in some African countries, contribute to this phenomenon on top of a culture which is very family focused, where you normally leave home once you get married, or you leave the country, we still have young people who are still the responsibility of their parents. And therefore they are still considered as children.

MH: Prompt: what do you mean by “considered as children”? : is this done by the families, the society, the community, Plan?

FC: No no, no, it has nothing to do with Plan. Beyond 18 we are not really involved although it does influence a little our activities. We talk about children between 0 and 18, but we have projects where we have children of more than 18 that are involved, for all the reasons I mentioned earlier. We find young people that are 20-22 years old that have not passed their baccalaureat yet, but are still within the school system. They might be involved in our projects. But if we only refer to the theory of it, Plan stops at 18. Going back to Poto Poto, our target was young people and children, age range 6-18 and above.

MH: Prompt: about young people still living at home, I'd like to explore this a bit more: what's the relationship between the families or society and these young adults who haven't left the family home? Are they treated as children?

FC: What I will say will only be my opinion because I do not have any research or data to back this up. But it is clear that as long as they stay in the family home and remain the parents' responsibility (they are fed, lodged, etc... by the parents), they are considered as children. However when I say children it has two meanings:

- children as unable to leave the nest. However they are also asked for their opinions in some of the decisions that are made. I mean if the youth is 23 or 25 years old, it is not because he is at home that he won't be allowed to speak his mind. It's all very relative.
- - some parents because they think that children owe something (such as food, etc..) to the parents, therefore they can think “well I am the one to decide for the family”, but that depends on the quality of relationships with the parents and on the level of education of the parents. Relationships in families differ from one family to the other.

MH: Prompt: would there be a gender difference at that level?

FC: I wouldn't know and I wouldn't be able to say. But girls between the age of 20-25 are often married and face another reality, although this is also changing and more and more older girls now stay in the family home.

MH: Rap was chosen by Plan as music relevant to youth: What does it mean that Rap speaks for the youth? All youths? Do we have in fact a divided youth?

FC : Well here it's a question of looking at the facts: whether it is in Africa or in the US, where one may consider that that is where Rap comes from, it's young people between the age of 15 and 25 that do rap. It's young people who write the texts, and although they follow some kind of a set format to write, the lyrics are about the society, what is good and very often, what is not good about it. It's also about a language that is created amongst the youth and this is what we started from. Rap speaks to young people and it's easier to communicate through Rap. It's linked to how messages are conveyed,. It's also linked to the artists' commitment. Being of the same age, they go through similar realities (as young people: ad.) and are best placed to describe this reality than an adult who is more of an observer.

MH: Prompt: Well Awadi is 40 years old...(laughter)

FC: (Serious tone): He is 40 indeed, but he started very early. And one can see that there is an evolution in his work. I have followed his career, and his lyrics were more about the hood and the home but he has evolved in his messages ; now he is on a higher plane, he talks to the authorities, he publicly says what he thinks on decisions, the issue of the APE, he has said what he thought about it. He is more committed. He remains an idol for young people and even when he reaches 50 and still raps, he has charisma and the goodwill he has created amongst young people. So even at 50 he will be able to pass on messages relevant to a 15 years old.

MH: Who is Poto Poto speaking to? :What youths and what children for the project? How would you define them?

FC: We should make a difference between what was written in the proposal , where we had to be quite precise in the audience targets and what is happening in reality. AURA is composed of various artists from different countries who bring in their own public. The project in itself is very interesting because it is a musical. It is something quite rare compared to what is on offer on the music market. It's done by rappers and they have messages that are very engaging. These concerts happen rarely. Very often in countries, it's one or two national rap artists who come together to do a concert when here it was more than 5-6 up to 10 Rap artists and this creates an event. Therefore we had our primary target audience and secondary target audiences (parents, very young children who might not understand it all but dance to rhythm of music). At the level of the live performances we had everyone, we had young people, less young (above 18 and parents), and different social and economic categories. Tags were put aside and the point was that everyone was coming to see various artists from different parts of Africa who came to such or such a country. The technical outlay was such that people knew that it would be a high quality concert.

MH: Prompt: during the focus group in September 2010, there are 2-3 things that I found interesting and that I would like to put to you. I saw quite a difference (in response)

between boys and girls with regards to appreciating rap and whether one felt concerned or not and this was quite gender based. Some girls might have come from the same social background but there was also a girl who was not part of the “girl group” who arrived together, and it was quite interesting because they said that *Rap was a language of the street in which I don't recognize myself, as I am more “at home” (and the boys further explained and agreed with that). I don't understand the language they speak.* This why I am trying to find out more about the decision/thought process about audiences whether a priori or at posteriori of the project. Therefore to whom was the project talking to? To whom did you manage to speak to? And what was that was conveyed (what did you try to say)? Is there a part of the audience that does not recognize itself in what was on offer? FC: If we go based on the responses that we have received from the focus group may be we are not in line with what happens in reality because may be the panel was not an ideal panel for this kind of statement. It is clear that some will get the message and others will not. And it is clear that may be it is linked to the music genre, not everybody listens to Rap. However it is not because we are from the “banlieues” or from the nice quarters that one likes or doesn't like rap or because we are a man or woman that we appreciate or don't appreciate. Because in reality there are many girls in Senegal that appreciate Rap at the level of the concerts, so it's may be that we got the wrong panel to make this kind of affirmation. If I go back to the concerts that we've had in countries, it is true that we have not had the time to count the numbers of boys and girls who attended. It is clear that we had an impression that there were many more boys but they still came. May be Awadi or other artists could say what happens during their concerts. But I don't think it has to do with where people live or with the education one receives. It's more a question of feeling, one appreciates the music or doesn't, we make the effort to listen and learn to like it or from the start one says they don't like it.

MH: Prompt: could it be that the image of Rap means that some people will not listen to it (will feel excluded or exclude themselves). One girl said she liked American Rap but did not like Rap in Wolof: is that because Rap in Wolof is crude and understandable in its crudeness. Could Rap speak to a certain youth whilst another would reject it? May be we group youth into one bag, all youth when may be young people it's in fact group make-ups that are very complex and sensitive to a multiple factors ?

FC: The problem with Rap, at least in Senegal and in some African countries, for instance in Senegal it's MBalah. Rap had to fight hard to get its place, although before MBalahh' the craze was very much Salsa. And now we have people who play mbalah and who call on to rap artists to feature in some of the songs. People understand that rap is something very important. But it's a hard fight between rap and Mbalah and therefore we have people that are still very much hooked on to Mbalah. But rap and Mbalah are becoming intertwined (Awadi and *Presidents d'Afrique*). Some will say that American Rap is better than Rap in Wolof, it might appear a bit awkward for them to listen to Rap in Wolof. May be a fear for something new to get into their culture. In Senegal we also have music called Tassou, which is just like Rap, which is in fact Rap but is not considered Rap. For others it is about the difficulty to leave Mbalah that we have known since we were small for something new. Some people are reticent; they do not want to appreciate new things. Therefore of course there are some people that have not been touched by the Poto Poto message. And some parents do ask why we are using Rap to push messages through when it has a negative connotation. But as I said earlier, we didn't

really research and monitor the numbers of boys and girls who attended. We assume that the audiences remembered some of the messages because coming out of the concerts they were using some of the taglines, some of the slogans they heard on stage. But we didn't go back in countries a month on to see if any of the messages stuck, we didn't go into depth

MH: And what does it try to say? And do you think it reached the audience? What makes you say that?

FC: The main theme was the promotion of the rights of the child. And this is Rap is able to do using an every day language. They are understood by everyone, although they do have some words/expressions that might come from the 'hood but which are still well-known by every one.

MH: Prompt: But what was the angle of the messages?

There were different communication axis. First it was to inform the target audience that children have rights. It was about diffusing them. It was about asking them to ask for their rights. And they went further by saying "this is what we the artists are doing" to help the implementation of these rights.

So it wasn't telling they have rights, but which are they and to show with concrete acts how they contribute to the realisation of rights. It is not about all children, as some do enjoy their rights: go to school, access to health, minimum of play time and good living conditions.

MH: Prompt: these were actions that showed and helped with the realisation of rights. But at the level of content for the products, I understood that it was a description of the reality of lives of many young people in Africa.

FC: Yes at level of the texts it's a description, in the live they showed who had rights and who hadn't. But during the concerts between the songs, they also spoke to the present population and they made the most to say children have rights, talked about CRC and they made the most to sensitise populations. So it's text and the sensitisation during the concerts.

MH: Assumption reinforced by literature and interviews that Rap's specificity is about being "Real", a true reflection of the of the real lives of the most excluded, where the most excluded feel they can recognise their lives in the lyrics of Rap songs: How is Poto Poto "real" in representing the lives of the children? How do you know?

FC: It's true that which children: the majority of children are concerned by this. It's true that with MDGs governments try to enrol more children in education. We still see the kids on the streets, they polish shoes, they help their parents work, they are exactly the children of the Poto Poto. Depending on each country you will see more of one type of kids or other. But these kids exist and they live in Africa.

MH: Prompt: how do they recognise the characters?

FC: You recognise them through how they are dressed. Often they are not listened to so we don't know how they speak and Rap is music with its own requirements for text. For instance through research we know that child soldiers speak in certain and we can use that, although we know that these kids are not often asked what they think by adults what

they think. It's artists who speak on their behalf and the material that we have coming out of own projects and that artists have been able to use.

At the level of conception, we tried to ensure that every time you look at the characters you know who they are because of the way they are dressed: Kalashnikov, the begging pot, the goodie bags for selling products.

MH: Prompt: Are these key symbols for the audience?

FC: Yes it's easy for people to recognise what it's about.

MH: Numbers for children living on the streets in West Africa or Senegal? Numbers for Talibe children? Numbers of orphans?

FC: No numbers. Plan doesn't do that as we rely on work of other organisations, but the numbers are usually on the low side.

MH: The specific state of children.

FC: yes, the child is vulnerable and it's enough that the adult do not care for the child there is a violation of his/her rights. It is linked to the vulnerability of the child.

Now the status of the child is present in the public discourse on developments: CSOs, governments. But it's true we need Poto Poto because although governments are conscious of the specific problems of children but it's a question of political will. There are ministries for childhood, the education ministries are aware of the lack of tools to work, they are very conscious. They cannot deny but it's a question of political choice. The NGOs are here and therefore a project like Poto Poto. MDGs are helping although for education they are enrolling children but the condition and quality of education is low. It is to meet the numbers, they hire houses to park children there. But it's only political: we have 98% enrolment so if you go and check it's not good quality. So that's the issue of the MDGs. In Dakar today there is 80% enrolment girls and boys, but the schools are flooded. The parents can't let their children in those places.

#### ***Annex 4: Full transcript Interview with Didier Awadi:***

*In 1989 Didier Awadi founded the Rap band Positive Black Soul (PBS) with Doug-E-Tee (Amadou Barry). Their first commercial success came in 1994 with the album Boul Faalé. In 2002 his first solo album Kaddu Gor, ("Word of honour" in English) won the RFI (Radion France International) World Music Award in 2003. In 2005, his album "Another world is possible" came out as a vibrant advocacy of more human policies and a greater inclusion of developing countries. In 2010, he shows his attachment to African integration with the album "Présidents d'Afrique" with the collaboration of various African rappers mixing with the voices of the heroes of the independence*

Mh: Hello Mr Awadi, thank you for taking my call. WE spoke already in February 2009 when I undertook the evaluation of the Poto Poto project. This time I will focus more on the audience and how it has received the Poto Poto cultural products: the CD, the concerts or the videos. I brought together a very small sample of the audience for a day to

work on what the AURA collective had done. Some interesting findings have come out and I would like to discuss those with you and see what you think. I would also like to ask you more general questions on Poto Poto and Rap in Senegal and West Africa.

Awadi: ok

Mh: If I go back to the audience and the focus group day, the sample was of boys and girls of 15 until 24 years old. All of them knew of AURA and they were all familiar with the two chart singles from the album. They were there all day, they watched all the video and music products. At one point I asked them whether they listened to Rap and whether they liked it. The answers were very clear: the boys said yes and Rap was central to their lives and that at times influenced them. The girls on the other hand, and it was striking, they said no. They said they didn't listen to Rap but more to R&B or Rap in English.

There were two reasons for this:

- either they didn't understand what was being said because as they call it it is the language of the streets described as the language of the boys
- or they understood they found the lyrics arrogant and were shocked by the violence of some of what was said.

In both cases I felt that it was a universe they felt excluded from. I wasn't sure if they were excluded or they excluded themselves so I asked them about female rappers and one said she preferred female rappers but the three others didn't like it because of the masculine gestures and inappropriate for a woman. With your experience in the field what do you think of these findings?

Awadi: For women and Rap?

Mh: yes or of the findings

Awadi: What I take from this is that it is clear that Rap is a male activity and that it talks a lot more to men. American Rap has a sexy side to it which here we don't make a priority. Here the priority is more about political and social fighting. The sexy side with a bare torso and big abdominals it is clear that it might be more attractive to girls than someone who will tell you about revolution or about changing of minds or about education. It is clear there is less of sexy aspect to African Rap than in American Rap. And even in the US, when you look at the percentage of women who rap, there are very few women who rap. It is a male exercise, one has to admit to this and we shouldn't close our eyes on this. There are more men who do it than women, it is more of a male art form.

Mh: is this tendency indeed linked to this street community of which women are not part of?

Awadi: Yes, that is clear, it is definitely the art of the streets and on the streets, women are not very present. It is an art of the streets, with codes coming from the streets, male street codes. And women are generally excluded from this male world. I wouldn't say hard or violent, but I would still call it male.

Mh: But would you say it is women excluding themselves or is it the culture?

Awadi: Yes exactly, they do not have the space to express themselves and they do not have... how can we say... it is not for them. Men have not taken them into account enough unfortunately. Rap is very self-centred.

Mh: What do you mean by that? Because you also talk about a social and political engagement.

Awadi: no that is about African Rap. Am trying to explain the difference between both. The sexiness and the quality of the videos and the shows mean that the girls can become interested. But for here we talk about social engagement and political engagement and women ... (interruption). We talk about things that are so un-sexy, women can't find an interest.

Mh: Are we talking of specific social class for women? Priss K refers to the fact that women in Cote d'Ivoire often waits for the man who will look after them for the future, highlighting a passive attitude. And she criticises this attitude.

Awadi: but that is true. Our societies are very much in an attitude of expectation. We wait for the man who is going to come. Here it is the man who spends, the man is head of the household, therefore the woman waits. In the country side it's something else. The woman manages the family; she's head of the household. In cities it's the man.

Mh: So it is the urbanisation process which changes the position for women?

Awadi: yes, in cities the woman tends to stay at home whilst out in the country, she goes out to the fields and the man does nothing and hangs out in the village square. (laughter)

Mh (laughter): When you said earlier that African Rap was about social and Political engagement,

Awadi: only for some though

Mh: exactly, I thought it might be the case for Senegal and Tanzania, a large part of West Africa but I feel that may be in places like Kenya this might not be the case and much closer to US or UK rap. Is there a tendency to drive Rap to become another consumption product like any other?

Awadi: In Kenya, they are very Americanised. And there is, very unlike here, not much of an African identity. There is a tendency to follow the US and what is going on in clubs. It really depends on the area. In Ghana and Nigeria they have quite a lot going on around issues such as women but there is tendency in those area for Rap to become more "sexy". With women dressed very sexily and who put forward their body, etc.

Mh: On the videos, they (the panel) knew both videos which they had seen on TV or during projections. They all had understood the Bienvenue à Poto Poto video but Poto Poto Dancing has created a lot of discussions and reactions on two issues:

- the panel was quite judgemental about the behaviours from the Poto Poto characters in the club which they referred to as a place of “perdition”. Would you say that the Senegalese is Conservative? Or was the video trying to show the characters in a place that is indeed a place of “debauchery”? What was your intention?

Awadi: we had to show something else. We had to show that for some youth life is hard. Poto Poto is a mirror of an excluded society. And if you are excluded this is the kind of life you lead. So it is good if people were shocked about this. Because people will see that it is not all rosy for everyone.

Mh: so the video was done on purpose to show the kind of party that the audience wouldn't go to?

Awadi: yes, exactly, it was done on purpose. “*See, here's a place you won't go to and this is these people's lives*”. However, despite it all, these people still have fun, they dance, they sing.

Mh: Another area of discussion was on the meaning of what is said at the end when the boy is being woken up and told that the future of Africa depends on him.

Awadi: the video is a dream and now we can't carry on dreaming. One has to get up and build that future.

Mh: but it is very hard to ask this of a talibe child who has a hard life already?

Awadi: Even to the talibes we have to ask this. Because if you look at someone like Lula who was a shoe-shine boy and he has become a president. Everything is possible, nothing is impossible.

Mh: And doesn't it seem harsh as an attitude though?

Awadi: To be a talibe is a time in your life. It is not an end in itself.

Mh: but the talibe is a child used for begging

Awadi: what we want is for this talibe to wake up and that he takes responsibility and undertakes his own revolution.

Mh: Is this possible?

Awadi: yes it is possible to free oneself. You have to be courageous and dare to confront it.

Mh: ok

Awadi: it's hard, it is not easy, it is not a guaranteed victory but it needs to be possible for everyone to be able to free oneself from this violence.

Mh: and is it the goal of this album?

Awadi: yes and we are going to show the dark side of the moon. Instead of saying it is wrong to be a beggar, we will show the violence in this world. Instead of saying prostitution is wrong, we will describe what prostitution is about. It is the violence of the image which ensures that people wake up.

Mh: is that the trick you have used for this album, to use the violence of these situations?:

Awadi: We did it with humour, but we had to describe the situations

Mh: about humour, I thought there was a lot of humour also in the album. Such as when your character does the hold up and at the end you complain that the stuff you collected is of bad quality of Chinese origin. But I found that the panel did not really respond to the humour in the album. Some were outraged by this hold up.

(laughter from both)

Awadi: It's about different levels of understanding. Some will get it and some won't. Some will be at the cultural level to be able to read this. But the album talks to everyone and some will have enough humour to get it. Those who are outraged do not understand at what level we speak. Humour is about culture, not everyone has the same codes to understand it

Mh: but Rap humour is quite specific

Awadi: No, humour is humour. We were not Rap artists doing this album, we did it as a theatrical play. The process was not hip hop, it was theatrical.

Mh: and are both so far from each other? I find Rap quite theatrical, even or especially with something like bling for instance.

Awadi: yeah may be somehow... Sometimes it goes too far that's clear (laughter)...

Mh: Thank you for this. Did you have anything you wanted to add, may be around Rap as a tool for engagement, is it more useful than other types of music to engage youth?

Awadi: here we are in countries where 60% of the population is under 18 and with Rap we can push through many messages. I remember in 1989 Rap was badly perceived, in 1997 we told them to vote and everyone voted. They grew up with our music and they went out and voted. And it changed the government which had been the same for 40 years in Senegal. Same in Kenya with Kubati. I am deeply convinced that Rap can help in changing people's mind. Today politicians give me a lot of respect even if they do not agree with all my positions, whether they are in government or in power. Because they know we represent something and they are conscious of the political power that we have.

Mh: what is specific about Rap which allows for that?

Awadi: it is about specific messaging. Mbaala is about singing praises to the king for money. We are about criticising the king. So he will never give us anything. But at the same time we talk about the problems of our societies and this is why we have an impact. It is true for many countries and in West Africa we are still about social and political Rap. In the US they have moved on to something else and that is normal at a different level of development. Thankfully we are still at a type of Rap that is about engagement.

Mh: ok thank you

End of interview.