

Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation

**The Use of Communication Technology
among Tokombéré Youth and its
Educational Potential**

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Introduction

Geographic and Administrative Situation: Situated 50 km from Maroua, near the main road from Maroua to Kousseri, Tokombéré is the capital of one of the districts of the Mayo-Sava Department of the Extreme-North Region of Cameroon. It measures 498 km² and consists of 6 cantons. From West to East the landscape is made up of an isolated mountain massif (inselberg), plains and smaller isolated mountains, the highest point being 1100 meters. Its Sahelian climate means 8 months of dry season from October to May and an annual rain fall of 450 to 850 mm per year.

Socio-economic Context: The population of Tokombéré division is estimated at 90'000 people (2005), with a population density of 170 people per km². Although Fulfulde is spoken by a large percentage of the population (especially men) due to its importance as a market language, twelve main ethnic groups make up the mountain population (formerly also called Kirdi) around Tokombéré. Each also constitutes a distinct language group: the Muyang (North-East of Tokombéré), the Mada (North-West) and beyond them the Ouldeme, Vame, Podoko and Matal, the Zulgo (West), the Gemzek (South-West) and beyond them the Merey and Mofu, the Mbuko (South) and the Moloko (South-East). Agriculture for private use and selling on regional markets is the main source of food and income, with millet, ground nuts, beans, and to a lesser degree, corn making up the main crops and Tokombéré being the main market in the area. Cotton is the main commercial crop, favoured by and sold to a well organized industry. Animal farming (chickens, goats, sheep and occasionally cows) is also practiced by most people, mostly for private use.

Research Objectives: In the location of my research, mobile phones with audiovisual output appear to be widely distributed and their use appears to continue to grow. This new trend

gives technology an increasing role as a communication carrier. Through my research I have sought to gain a better understanding of the kinds of programs, languages, distribution methods and formats which can be used to harness technology most effectively for educational purposes.

Methods of Research: Using personal interviews and observations, I have gained insight into the forms, uses, distribution and perceived value of communication and entertainment technology among youth living in Tokombéré. My observations have mainly served to understand the attitudes and the know-how of youth with regards to the use of mobile phones and other information technology. Using a questionnaire on the other hand has given me more statistical information on the spread of mobile phones, the types of phones used and the entertainment and social value attributed to them by youth in Tokombéré.

Wider socio-cultural context

Technology for communication: According to recent publications, communication technology has in recent years massively gained in importance in Africa. In Cameroon, for instance, in an attempt to discourage corruption, an Android application was developed which allows citizens to report any bribes or corruption affairs, the underlying idea being that 'in Africa, everything is done by SMS' (Pamela Whitby: BBC Focus on Africa July-September 2012, page 50). Whitby also points out that according to Fola Yahaya of the communications consultancy (no further information given), the importance of mobile phone communication in Africa is mainly caused by its 'terrible transport networks'. Usage of the internet, on the other hand, is far from being accessible to the masses with only about 10 % of an estimated 600 million mobile phones used in Africa even allowing for internet access.

Technology for entertainment: Having glanced at the importance of new technologies for communication purposes, what observations have been made with regards to the spread and usage of entertainment technologies in Africa? Slimani informs us that Nollywood, the Nigerian cinematographic enterprise, has become the world's second largest film industry with 20 to 40 fictional films being published per week, creating 200'000 jobs and an income of 300'000 million dollars a year (Jeune Afrique Hors-Série No 35, January 2014, page 98, free translation from French). According to her research, Nollywood films have become so popular among Africans living all around the world, that web based TV Nollywood boasts more than 1 million visitors a month from 213 countries around the world. More recently, in the early 2000's, Ghallywood of Ghana has also seen a revival thanks to the democratisation of cameras and computers. Slimani tells us that producing in the local language Twie as well as addressing local issues such as witchcraft, marriage and local tradition has made it possible for Ghanaian producers to compete with Nollywood, now publishing around 300 films a year, an output which is equivalent to that of France.

The potential of communication technology to promote local economies and development

First of all, the passing on of information by any means is essential to bringing justice to all people groups. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lists 'the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information through any media regardless of frontiers' as a human right. Along the same lines Lewis tells us that 'access to information is becoming increasingly synonymous with the world's definition of success and power' (1997). He goes on to say that the growing dependence on information technology widens the gap between the poor and the rich of this world. An example of this is seen in African film-making: Armes laments that although 'European languages were imposed on Africa, there was no matching transfer of technology' (African Filmmaking,

2006, page 7). As a result, Western values have in the past seemed to dominate the world, elevating those who are able to embrace them and oppressing those who cannot.

Fortunately, information technology also has the potential to counteract this injustice: 'Information technology can equally increase or decrease this information gap' and 'we must work hard to define how information technology can do the latter' (Lewis, 1997). Armes tells us that while African literature faces the negative effects caused by the use of foreign languages, 'the technology of film offers a very different solution. Film dialogue in the native language can be followed easily by even an illiterate (if limited) African public, while, at the same time, subtitles can make the film accessible to a Western audience' (African Filmmaking, 2005, page 7).

Because 'the African public has become more and more fond of African films made by Africans for Africans, on subjects that interest them', African producers have been able to overcome some of the financial challenges to African film making such as piracy and the lack of cinemas (Jeune Afrique Hors-Série No 35, Janvier 2014, page 98, free translation from French). While Ghallywood focuses on DVDs as a means of distribution, the Nigerian government has invested 200 million dollars into local film production in an attempt to reduce poverty.

In the same way, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation states that 'in the area of knowledge economies, access to information, knowledge and technology by a critical mass of people is a key to general prosperity and has a clear effect on rooting democracy' (Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education, page 18). The same document states that 'languages and communication are the foundation for the economy'. Because 'the creative sector is very much tied to the local and

regional markets and also produces for export' and because 'its services require complex linguistic and communicative competences', UNESCO asks African decision makers to seek to promote local languages through multilingual education (page 19). Again, the success story of Nollywood is referred to as a case in point: 56 % of its films are produced in the local languages Yoruba (31%), Hausa (24%) and Igbo (1%) (page 20). But examples can be found elsewhere: Microsoft has begun to develop software in Kiswahili and 'newspapers and cell phone companies communicate with their customers about computer technology and telecommunication in Kiswahili' (page 18).

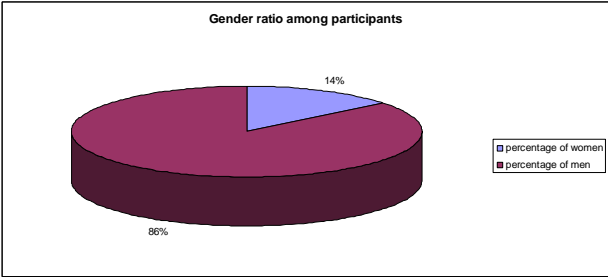
And finally, the benefits of contextualizing communication technology are far from being only economic in nature. The Department for International Development recommends using video and audio technology to give illiterates a voice. Images can for example 'be played back to the people concerned, giving them new insights into their own surroundings; images can also be shown to policy-makers, as part of advocacy efforts on behalf of a community'. In addition 'images can be shown to other groups, enabling them the horizontal transfer of good practice' (Burke, 1999).

Summary

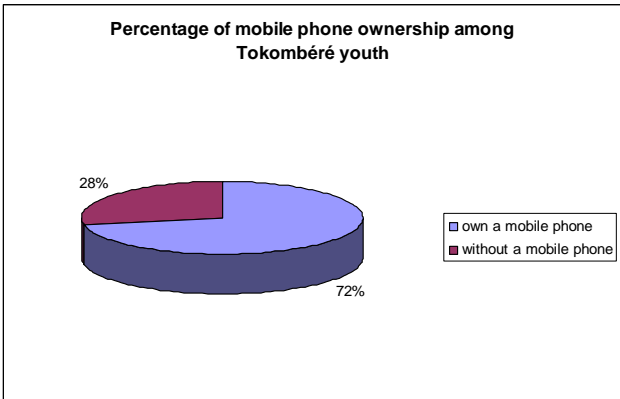
Clearly, the spread of communication and entertainment technology has made a huge impact on social behaviour in Africa, both in terms of overcoming communication barriers, but also in terms of satisfying a growing hunger for relevant, locally made entertainment. As we have also seen, local productions in local languages and on local issues also have the potential to improve local economies and development. How do these trends impact Tokombéré youth? How could educationalists and development efforts make use of them in Tokombéré and its surroundings? In what follows, I hope to answer these questions by presenting my findings.

Access to communication technology among Tokombéré youth

The following statistical results have been collected with the help of questionnaires (see annex), filled in by a total of 56 Tokombéré youth with an average age of just under 20 years. Although the youngest participant was 15 years old and the oldest 35, the vast majority of the participants were between 19-21 years of age. In order to make the questionnaires more reliable, especially with regards to the more open-ended questions, I was assisted by Jean-Baptiste Nдавkouда, receptionist of the only printing and secretarial service in Tokombéré. Because privately owned computers are rare in this town, the local youth often come to Jean-Baptiste for loading audio and video files on to their mobile phones. He explained the survey questions to volunteers and where needed, assisted them in filling it in without influencing their personal responses. Almost without exception, all participants were students. Because of the method of data collection, 86 % of the participants were of the male gender.



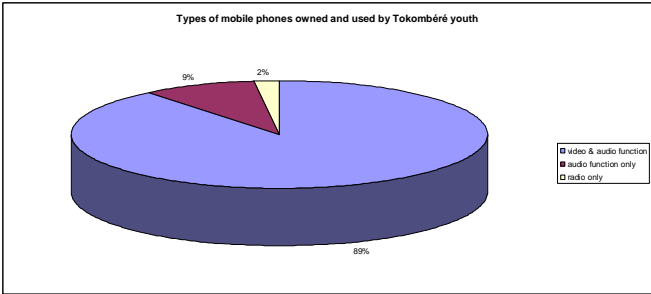
It must be said that the location in which the data was collected does not promise an unbiased representation of the target group because of the uneven representation of the two genders, because participants are more likely to have a particular interest in mobile



phone entertainment and for other reasons. However, questions were designed in such a way that more representative conclusions could be made, for example by asking participants to give statistical information with regards to their school class or household. This is true for the

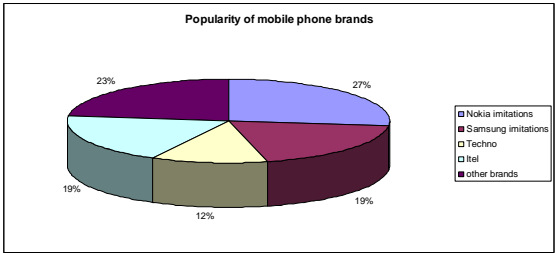
percentage of mobile phone ownership among Tokombéré youth (72 %) which is based on the statistical information given by participants with regards to mobile phone ownership among their class mates. Although the majority of participants were students, this is a representative group as almost every youth goes to school in Tokombéré.

In terms of the types of mobile phones owned by youth in Tokombéré, 89 % are video and audio enabled and another 9 % are at least audio enabled, making it



possible to listen to choice music. Interestingly, even the remaining 2 % of owned mobile phones allow for at least some entertainment via radio. Of 54 participants (2 questionnaires were inconclusive), only 4 phones were not equipped with a memory card, the rest have the capacity to store and play video and audio files. Of these, 20 participants use a 1 GB memory card, 19 use a 2 GB memory card and 1 person even has a 4 GB card. I must note however that these results with regards to percentage of memory card usage are likely to be unrepresentative of the target audience since one of the reasons for coming to the place of survey is to download video and audio files. In fact, in my observations I have come to realize that many people actually regret not having a memory card, as these must be bought separately, and can therefore not make use of the entertainment technology which their phone offers. But what the statistics do show is that the majority of available memory cards have a capacity of between 1 and 2 GB.

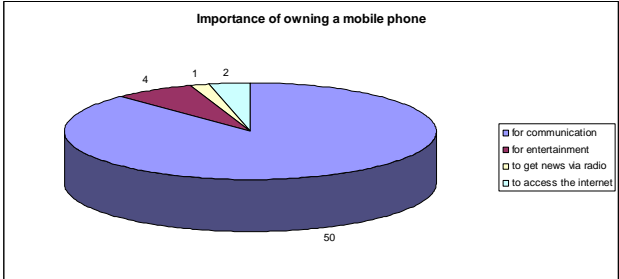
With regards to the high percentage of video and audio enabled phones, my observation tells me that the result is quite representative because of



the mobile phone models and brands that are popular and available on the market such as Tecno, ITEL Nokia imitations and Samsung imitations almost all are video and audio enabled.

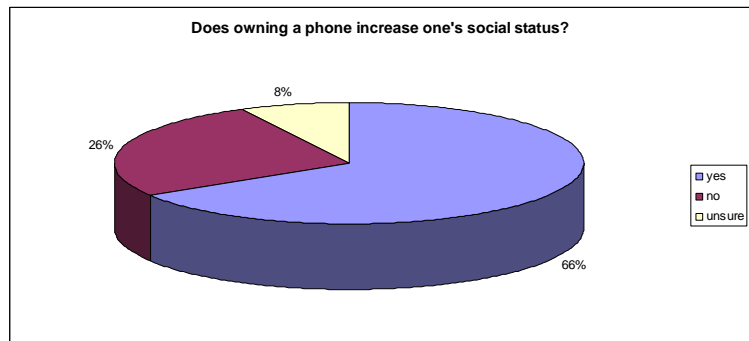
The use of mobile phones

Before evaluating the usage of mobile phones for entertainment, I have attempted to identify the main purpose of owning a phone as seen by the target group. Do



mobile phones have more of an entertainment value to youth in Tokombéré, or does communication continue to be in the foreground? The freely given responses to the question 'Is it important to own a mobile phone? If yes, why?' seem to indicate an overwhelming emphasis on the practicality of mobile phones for communication purposes. Some gave more precise reasons for why communication is so important to them such as the need to communicate with far away parents (many of the students in Tokombéré come from surrounding villages in the planes and mountains and are renting or staying with someone other than their parents) and the financial and time-saving benefits of communicating via the mobile phone as opposed to travelling. One person mentioned the possibility to call the police in case of an emergency and one person said that owning a mobile phone is important because it is modern. Interestingly the possibility of accessing the internet was also mentioned by two individuals. Although I do not know what percentage of phones would allow such access, I know by observation that access to the internet is a possibility which a limited number of youth enjoy at home or at the home of a friend. I have also observed that some youth accessed the internet via their mobile phone thanks to an offer by a mobile phone company which granted free access within a certain time frame.

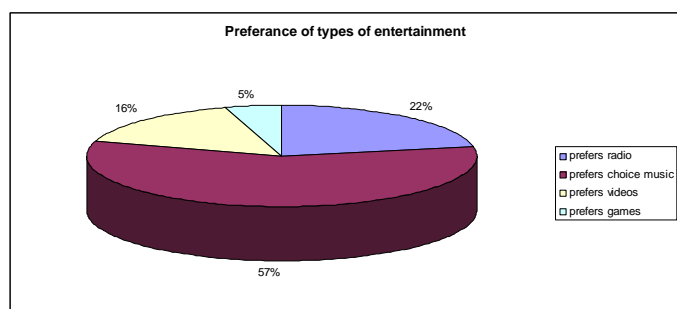
In terms of the social value of a mobile phone, 66 % of the participants think that owning a mobile phone increases the respect they get from others. More

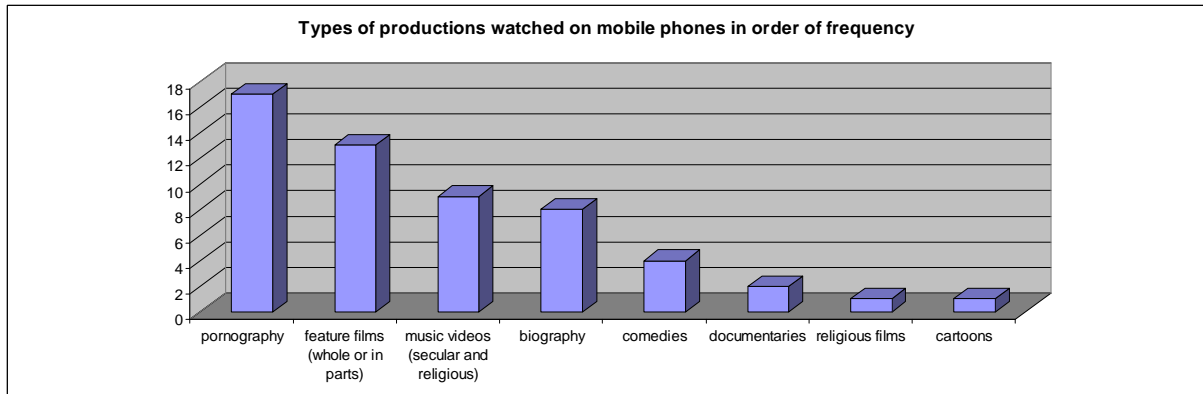


specific reasons given for this were having more performing loudspeakers, letting others use the phone, providing entertainment for others, letting others copy files on to their phones, being 'respected by thieves', being able to call one's dad, thus scaring off thieves, being able to produce good video on one's phone, being able to get tasks done which one has been given, being available to get tasks done for others and being able to share someone's number with others.

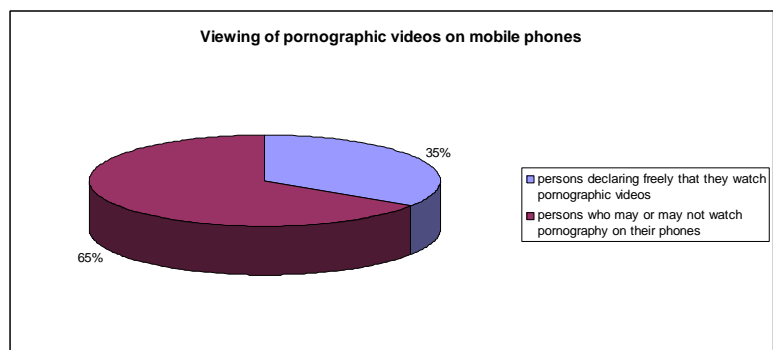
While a few among those who do not see the mobile phone as having a positive effect on their social status said that this depends more on personality or was irrelevant because owning a phone has become the norm, the majority of them gave reasons for why the mobile phone actually reduces or endangers one's social status. One person said 'no because the phone has made me so poor that I can't even buy salt' and another person also stated 'no, it makes people poor'. Other reasons for an negative influence on one's social status were that they often bother others with the noise or that 'some exaggerate and see the phone as if it's all they have'.

Although, as we saw ealier, a high percentage of mobile phones are video enabled, the statistics show that choice music is the preferred form of entertainment.





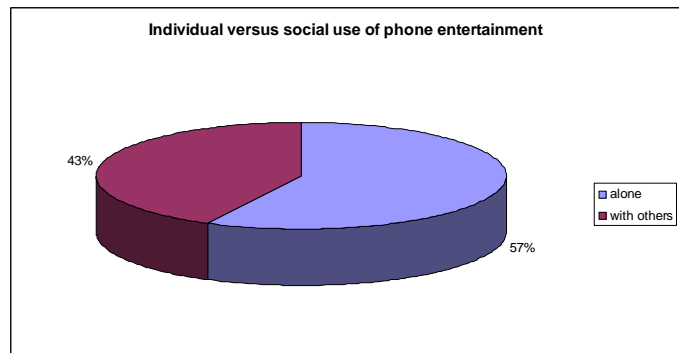
Videos downloaded from the internet from various sources were second on the list of preferred entertainment, with only a few individuals giving more importance to radio or video games. When asked to describe the types of videos they watch (see chart above which presents the number of times each type of production was listed), a shockingly high percentage of 35 % freely mentioned pornographic videos. This was the case, even though the questionnaire made it possible for them to mention these as immoral productions which others watch only. Even women were among those who watch pornography, although to a much lower percentage. Interestingly most participants listed pornography both among their personal choice of videos as well as immoral videos that are watched by others. The second most popular video type are entire feature films or parts of films. The fact that these are most likely originally downloaded from the net most likely accounts for the fact that some films are split up into sections for easier upload.



The next question of research I would like to address is why do young people in Tokombéré entertain themselves via their mobile phones. What is, according to them, the main reason for doing so? The reasons given for this are that this helps to forget one's worries, provides motivation for work, helps to be informed, improves one's mood, provides comfort when one

is unhappy, makes time go by, clears one's mind, helps to get to know one's tradition (unclear), provides some fun, helps to know one's origin or tradition. In summary it can be said that youth in Tokombéré appreciate entertainment on their mobile phones mainly for its psychological and informative benefits.

In terms of the practical use of mobile phone, it appears that it is used both for individual entertainment as well as for entertaining one's peers. While one individual stated that his mobile phone

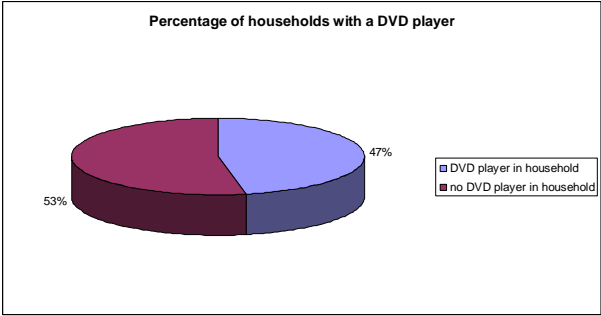


serves him for 'secret entertainment alone in the night', 43 % use their mobile phone entertainment together with others. This social use of mobile phone entertainment allows individuals to see what others have, show their own productions and share files via bluetooth, a common practice which can be observed not just among youth but also adults. This practice also gives those who do not own a phone the possibility to see and hear what others find entertaining. The research also suggests that videos are more commonly listened to together with others than music, as three participants made a clear distinction between listening to music alone but watching videos with others.

Other communication and entertainment technology

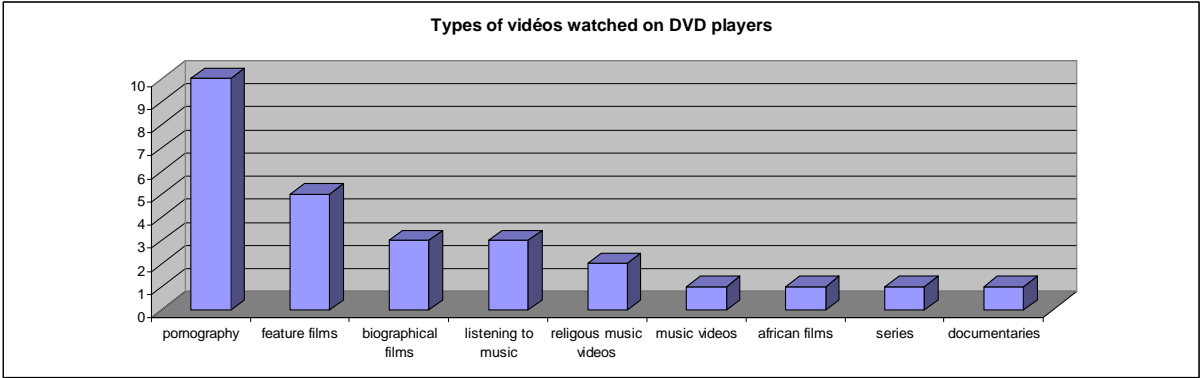
In an effort to focus my research, I have not collected any in-to-depth data on the usage of other communication and entertainment technologies such as radio, television and the internet. However, in an effort to make a comparison between video technology as used in

the past and the new possibilities arising with the mobile phone, I also gathered data on the



usage of DVD players in the area. Although aimed at whether or not a DVD player is present in the participant's household, the survey questions in this case cannot give an accurate representation of the use of DVD

players by Tokombéré youth. A number of them are renting independant rooms in Tokombéré and are not staying with their parents who might or might not have a DVD player at home. On top of this aspect it must be considered that as opposed to the sourrounding villages, most households in Tokombéré have electricity. Also, the average income of people living in Tokombéré is likely to be higher than that of people living in the sourrounding villages. Nevertheless, the result shows that DVD players are still frequently used with almost half of the households in which youth live owning one. Again, according to the frequency of listing, pornography appears to be the most popular type of video watched on DVD players.



Part of the reason for the continued popularity of DVD players may be that TV screens provide a much better image resolution than mobile phones. But as we have seen earlier, there may also be a social component to this reality.

Final conclusions

My research has identified the mobile phone as the number one communication and entertainment instrument among Tokombéré youth, an instrument which is so widely distributed and used that those who do not own one are the exception. Although there are clear indications that mobile phones are also used for educational purposes and even promoting local tradition and identity, the research also shows that an overwhelming percentage of its users primarily consume addictive entertainment from abroad with no educational value and without making use of the technology for their own local needs. The majority of videos, be they entertaining or educational, as is the case with a small percentage of viewed productions, are downloaded from the net and have little relevance to the lives of youth in Tokombéré. My background research has shown that educationalists and economists see great potential for using communication and entertainment technology to promote regional cultural identity and regional (financial) development. Experiences in Africa support this. However, with regards to Tokombéré youth this potential is far from being exploited. At the moment, mobile phones provide them with a bit of entertainment and practical help with their personal communication needs. Although my observation has shown that recording local events on mobile phones is a very common practice, these serve private purposes only.

In summary I would like to suggest that NGOs, religious institutions, private organisations, artists and local educationalists in Cameroon must in the future pay more attention to the educational potential offered by mobile phones, DVD players and radio in Tokombéré by promoting community radio and the local production of educational audio and video messages which address local needs in local languages. As we have seen earlier, this is not just a human right or a pathway to local development, but also a must in the face of the destructive values and habits which unfortunately accompany modern communication technology.

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Annexe: Survey questionnaire (*the layout has been changed to reduce space*)

Enquête parmi les Jeunes à Tokombéré sur l'utilisation des téléphones portables

1. Nom:
2. Age:
3. Sexe (m / f?):
4. Lieu d'habitation:
5. Langue maternelle:
6. Occupation / classe:
7. Portable (marque et modèle):
8. Il y a t'il une carte mémoire? De quelle taille?
9. Il y a t'il Bluetooth? Est-ce que vous utilisez Bluetooth? Pourquoi (pas)?
10. Pouvez-vous écouter de la musique, la radio ou d'autres productions audio sur votre portable? Si oui, qu'est ce que vous écoutez?
11. Qu'est-ce que vous écoutez le plus fréquemment?
12. Où / comment est-ce que vous trouvez / achetez cette musique ou ces productions audio?
13. Pouvez-vous regarder des vidéos sur votre portable? Si oui, qu'est ce que vous regardez?
14. D'où prenez vous ces vidéos?
15. Sur le portable, quelle est votre divertissement préféré: les vidéos, la musique ou la radio? Pourquoi?
16. Est-ce que vous écoutez ou regardez les vidéos ou les productions audio seul ou avec d'autres personnes?
17. Est-ce qu'il y a un lecteur DVD là où vous habitez? Si oui, qu'est ce que les gens regardent avec le lecteur DVD?
18. Est-ce que c'est important d'avoir un portable? Pourquoi?
19. Est-ce que vous êtes respecté par les autres à cause de votre portable? Pourquoi (pas)?
20. Les gens, regardent-ils aussi des mauvaises productions? Lesquelles?
20. Combien de personnes habitent dans votre foyer / ménage / là où vous habitez?
21. Parmi les personnes qui habitent dans votre ménage, combien ont un portable?
22. Si vous êtes étudiant / élève, combien de personnes sur combien d'élèves ont un portable dans votre classe?
(Mettre par exemple '11/ 32', si de 32 élèves dans votre classe, 11 ont un portable)
23. Autres commentaires / informations que vous aimeriez donner: