



## Activity Report: Social Debates

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### Introduction

The social debates are a weekly event – held on Saturday, 18:00 at the Project. Edy Meitocheira was, until his departure from the project to go and study in Maputo, responsible for planning each of these debates. From a list he had previously put together, he would select a theme and prepare the layout of the discussion. The themes selected varied from Patriotism, Punctuality, Social roles of parents and sons, Social roles of man and woman, Friendship, Development and Environment, etc.

The main objective of this activity is to develop Critical Thinking. By participating in these debates the students learn and exercise the ability to formulate an argument, present it in a structured way, debate it before contrary views and reach an informed conclusion. On the occasion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cinema Cycle of the Museum of the Island of Mozambique, Projecto Oceano was invited to organize a debate session which would take place after each screening.

The cinema cycle was one of Mozambican dramas, comedies and documentaries that addressed topics ranging from sexual abuse in school to everyday market life, so sure to provide plenty to talk about.

We decided to accept the invitation to co-ordinate these debates for several reasons. Firstly, the advantage of having a film as a basis for discussion rather than just a topic headline would really help kick off discussions. Secondly, these debates would attract a much wider range of the community, meaning fresh debate participants. Thirdly, with a wider community involvement, the debates would be good publicity for the project. Finally, it would freshen up the debate format, which had remained the same for some time now and the interest of the students was starting to waver.

### Preparation

Each week Edy and some of the other project members would get a copy of the film to be screened, and have a sneak preview to get an idea of what topics might come up in the debates in order to prepare appropriate questions to pose to the audience. The museum was lucky that we did this, as some copies of films didn't actually work, so we were able to give advance notice of any technical problems as a bonus. There was also the question of whether the content would be acceptable to screen in the context of the Ramadan period. For example, there was some fairly confronting content in a film and so they decided to delay the screening until the end of the Muslim festival Ramadan, so as not to upset local members of the community.

If appropriate, we would invite relevant members of the community to participate in the debate. For example, in the film about sexual abuse in school, local teachers and school administrators were invited to the screening to give their view on the issue.

## The Debates and the Cinema Cycle at the Museum

- Week 1, 07/08/2010: "Ilha dos Espiritos"

This was the introduction of the cinema cycle and no debate was done.

- Week 2, 14/08/2010: "Mariana e a Lua"

In total 151 people attended, around 122 island residents and 29 foreigners. In this session the debate covered the Traditional VS Conventional Medicine, explored local beliefs and habits regarding the two and the difference between spiritual and physical illness.

- Week 3, 21/08/2010: "Grande Bazaar"

In this session 119 island residents and 47 foreigners attended. The debate explored the street kid's problematic, education in general and in Mozambique in particular, parenting and the parent's role/responsibility in relation to their children's behavior.

- Week 4, 28/08/2010: "Hóspedes da Noite"

On this screening, 146 people attended in total (124 residents and 22 non residents). Due to technical issues (power cut) the debate was not held that week.

- Week 5, 04/09/2010: NGWENYA-O Crocodilo

On this screening, 124 people attended in total (115 residents and 9 non residents). The debate was not held that week.

- Week 6, 11/09/2010: "Árvore dos Antepassados"

To this screening, 134 people attended in total (130 residents and 4 non residents). The debate revolved around the Civil War and its consequences, refugees and traditional culture.

- Week 7, 18/09/2010: "Desobediência"

On this screening, 63 people attended in total (61 residents and 2 non residents). The debate was not held that week.

- Week 8, 25/09/2010: "Jardim do outro Homem"

On that week there were 124 people present, of which 118 were residents and 6 non residents.

Given the nature of the issues portrayed in this film, a series of invitations were made by the Museum's team to students and teachers of both the Professional School and the Secondary School. Unfortunately the invitations were unanswered and none of the School representatives or teachers attended. However, we did have the presence of the Museum's Director – Dr. Silvério and the Island's Mayor as well as local artist Paulo Magalhães and Musim representatives.

The film approached the issue of abuse of power, corruption and sexual harassment, particularly at school. We discussed the student/teacher relation and the role of the Provincial and District Education Board as well as the School itself, student's rights and the mechanisms available to counter this reality.

- Week 9, 02/10/2010: "Teias da Aranha"

On that week there were 131 people present, of which 129 were residents and 2 non residents.

Due to weather conditions the debate was not possible.

- Week 10, 09/10/2010: “Trilogia das Novas Familias”

These are three documentaries that portrayed stories of HIV/AIDS orphans. The discrimination that affects HIV positive people, the lack of institutional support were the main issues addressed.

- Week 11, 16/10/2010: On´hipiti Festival

Collection of films about the island and photos of the work being done at Projecto Oceano were shown at On´hipiti Festival.

- Week 12, 23/10/2010: “A Mãe dos Netos” e “Mãos de Barro”

On that week there were 118 people present, of which 112 were residents and 6 non residents. Once again HIV/AIDS was the central topic. The lack of information in the rural remote areas and prevention were the issues debated around the first film. The second film led the discussion into globalization and the cultural heritage of Mozambican culture and values, particularly how it is being passed or not on to the next generation.

This was also the closing session of the film cycle and the Director of the Museum took the opportunity to thank Projecto Oceano and highlighted the extraordinary ability of our young members in debating such varied range of subjects throughout the sessions.

### **For the future**

The association between the film cycle and the Oceano team was a success. The members were engaged and actively participating in the debates and the films provided a great stimulation around the issues to be debated.

One important point that we would like to note is the necessity of engaging the members of the community and others in the discussions given that some of the debates could have greatly benefited from technical and empirical input. For example, on one of the debates there was a claim made at some point that crocodile blood was actually a cure for AIDS. This claim happened to have been made by an influential member of the community and it was quite a challenge to deconstruct this myth without generating animosity.

It was a great achievement bringing foreigners as well as other members of the community into the discussions as they brought different experiences and were very curious about the culture, habits, beliefs and traditions of Mozambique. The exchange proved to be a very rich learning experience both ways. There was also the recognition of the success of this partnership between the Museum and Projecto Oceano resulting in an invitation to extend this collaboration in a future screenings to be held at local schools being planned by the Museum.

The debates are now moderated by Firoza Abdulcadre and a summary of the main points and conclusions of these will be maintained hopefully to be shared on our website and perhaps take the debate across Mozambican borders.