Beautiful Culture

Uganda is a beautiful country with a rich culture. Culture is a belief, tradition, custom, behaviour, values or practice by a particular group of people or society.

Young Talk visited Moroto and Napak districts in Karamoja. We were excited to see Mt Moroto and the traditional huts locally known as Manyattas that promotes community togetherness. The local tasty food and beautiful people dressed in their colourful traditional dress spice up the beauty of Karamoja.

Thanks to the Young Talkers who shared stories about their culture.

Christine Lumai, P7, Moroto Municipal PS, says:
"I love our traditional dressing. When we have a traditional ceremony, I wear beads, danglers, a round skirt and sleeveless blouse. This makes me look so beautiful."

Catherine Abulo, P6, 15, Kangole Girls PS, Napak, says: "I enjoy the traditional marriage ceremonies. We eat a lot of food and invite people from other clans to attend. They become our friends and we stop fighting each other. This promotes peace and unity."

J.B Lopuka, 17, Kalotom PS, Napak says: "When a baby is born, elders and clan members meet to give it a name. Different names are suggested. If a name is mentioned and the baby starts breastfeeding, it means it has accepted it."

Anna Grace Akol, Moroto KDA PS, says: "I love our traditional food. When a cow is slaughtered, we boil blood and eat. It is delicious."

Editor: Culture teaches you about values and beliefs that influence the way you behave or the decisions you make in life.

But remember, there are both good traditional practices and those that are harmful. For example, treating boys and girls differently, is a bad traditional practice because it denies them of their rights, while staying a virgin until you finish school is a good traditional practice. It helps you stay healthy and study well.

Beautiful culture

In every culture, there exists good and bad practices. Do not stick to harmful practices such as wife inheritance, forced marriages, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and treating boys favourably and discriminating girls.

You should be agents of change. Adopt good practices.

Good practices protect you from violence, promote peace, unity, respect, good health and keep you in school. This enables you to enjoy rights such as the right to health, education, participation and safe childhood.

Good practices also promote child participation. This is because children are consulted or allowed to give their opinion on matters that affect them.

In many cultures, children are encouraged to respect their elders. They grow up with the value of respecting people around them including their fellow children.

This promotes peace and unity.

By Peter Bahemuka, Senior Program Officer, Raising Voices, Kampala.

HIV BASIC

Is it true that when a person who is HIV positive swallows Panadol tablets and goes for a test the HIV virus will not be detected?

Boy, 14, Wakiso.

This is not true. Taking Panadol tablets can not affect HIV test results especially when the person is positive. When a person living with HIV/AIDS takes ARVs every day as advised by healthworkers, the amount of virus in their body reduces, sometimes to levels that cannot be easily detected.

However, this should never be mistaken to mean a person has turned HIV negative. ARVs do not cure HIV/AIDS. To be sure of your HIV status, test at least three times a year from recognised HIV counselling and testing centres.

Counsellor: Dr. Joel Lwasa, St Charles Lwanga Hospital, Buikwe.
Watch out for harmful practices

In our society, harmful cultural practices deny children of their rights including: the right to education, good health and safe childhood. Some of you shared dangerous cultural practices that you should stay away from. Thank you!

**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING**

Rachael Akireng, 14, P7, Moroto Municipal PS says: “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting of girls leads to school dropout. My friend was mutilated when she was in P6. She stopped coming to school because pupils used to laugh at her. She is now hiding in Kenya. Dear Parents, stop forcing girls to be mutilated claiming they will be clean for marriage.”

Christopher Dowan, 16, P6, KDA Moroto says: “In my culture, boys are raised to be herdsmen. My brother takes care of our goats, cows and sheep. He does not go to school. One day, he was attacked by cattle raiders who beat him and stole our cows.”

**Child marriage**

Praia, Namubira, 16, P7,

KDA PS, Moroto says: “My friend’s uncle picked her from school saying her mother had died. She went home but found her mother cooking for some men. She was forced to get married to one of the men. She left the marriage but she now has HIV. She sells champattis in Camp Swahili market.”

**Shaving**

Sidida Holem, 23, P6, Moroto Municipal PS says: “When my grandmother passed on, we were all shaved. We shared razor blades. This can make us get diseases like ringworms and HIV/AIDS.”

**Child Sacrifice**

Constance Abucho, 15, P7, Kangoie Girls PS, Napak says: “Some children are sacrificed for riches which is not good.”

**Tattoos / Beauty Scars**

Omar Kalurib Lepera, Kalotom PS, Napak says: “I hate tattooing my body. It is very painful and it can make you get HIV/AIDS because people share razorblades.”

Albert Auda, teacher, Kajotem PS, Napak says: “The tattoos are meant to enhance one’s beauty. They also show a warrior’s experience in battles. The more people a warrior kills during cattle raids, the more tattoos he gets. They use razorblades to cut the flesh and rub the ash into the wounds so that the scars can be clearly seen. Sharing a razorblade promotes infection of diseases like HIV/AIDS.”

**Education**

Kizito Lotem, 16, P6, Lia PS, Moroto says: “My friends always discourage me from going to school. They say that education is for prostitutes and that I will die of AIDS.”

**Girls cut from caves, forests**

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is practiced among the Sabiny in Kapchorwa, Bukwo and Kween districts in Sebei sub-region and among the Tepeth, Kadama and Pokot people in Karamoja sub-region.

The World Health Organization defines FGM/C as partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Mark Lolem Aleper, Teacher, Lia PS, Moroto says: FGM/C is a rite of passage into womanhood. It is mostly carried out on girls between 12 and 15 years. These days, traditional cutters and parents do it in hiding from caves and forests because they know that it is illegal. After mutilation, girls are hidden in granaries until they heal. Some are forced to get married thereafter.

Wise girls escape and come back to school but their husbands come and pick them by force. Most parents say that girls who are educated become prostitutes. Some children start school at the age of 15 because they are brought by friends who value education. Others go to school because they are assured of being offered meals.”

Moroto District Health Officer, Andrew Ilukol

Rews says: FGM/C has increased the death burden among women and girls. They are cut in hiding and they often bleed to death as a result of complications.

FGM/C leads to birth complications and infections like HIV/AIDS because the traditional cutters use the same knives or razor blades on different girls. Girls that undergo FGM/C are denied of their reproductive health rights.

In Uganda, FGM/C is illegal. A person convicted of the practice faces a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. In case a girl dies, gets a disability or HIV/AIDS, the punishment is life imprisonment.

Some of the instruments used for FGM/C

**Key Messages**

Always say No to harmful practices because they violate your rights, expose you to HIV/AIDS, lead to school dropout, child marriage, fistula and death.

Stay in school. Education does not make you a prostitute. Education is a basic right for every child. It enables you to acquire knowledge and skills to help you stay healthy, active and develop yourself, family and community.

Report people who force you into harmful practices to your teachers, Police, District Education Offices, an adult you trust or Call
Street life is terrible

Whenever cars get stuck in a traffic, children emerge and start begging. Some are accompanied by adults who watch them from a distance. When good Samaritans drop coins in their hands, the adults collect the money from them. We spoke to some street children who shared problems that forced them on the streets. Read on!

John Engella, 15, from Napak District says: “I came to Kampala because of hunger. I survive on begging. I spend the money on food and rent. I share a room with nine other street children. Sometimes, my parents in the village ask me to send them some money. My challenge is that the speeding motorcycles I get knocked as I squeeze myself between cars to beg.”

Ivan Molya, 12, from Buyende District says: “When my Father died, my Mother got married to another man. He could not buy for me books and I eventually dropped out of school in P4. I walked from Buyende to Jinja for two days. I started selling empty water bottles. I got transport and came to Kampala. I hate street life. Older boys beat us and steal our money. When I fall sick, I don’t get any medical treatment.”

Lawrence Ssendagire, 13, from Mayuge District says: “My Mother took me to live with my Grandmother who couldn’t pay my school fees. I got tired of digging and went to Iganga. I sold scrap for 6 months. I later went to Jinja. I lived on the streets for two years before I came to Kampala to beg.

Life is hard. I sleep on cold floors in the old taxi park. Some street children force us to smoke, take marijuana and sniff fuel. When you refuse, they stab you.”

Do not run away from home

Many times when children are faced with problems, they run away from home. This is wrong!

If you or a friend are going through a tough time, talk to someone like your headteacher, a close relative, friend, a neighbour or a community leader about your problem to find a solution.

James Mugabu, Kakabara PS Kabale, says: “My Auntie used to drink alcohol and whenever she got drunk, she would beat and deny us food. I reported her to the LC1 Chairperson. He came home and asked Auntie to stop mistreating us. She did not beat us again.”

You too can do something to change your situation. Do not run away from home. Living on the streets makes you more vulnerable to abuse. You could be defiled, beaten, killed or learn bad habits like stealing and taking harmful drugs like marijuana.

This puts you at risk of getting HIV, STDs, teenage pregnancy or even death.

Remember, there are many children in similar or worse situations but they choose to deal with their problems at home.

Avoid self pity. Self pity is caused by different things like feeling that you can not manage to do things right, being an orphan, having poor parents or parents who do not care.

- Stop feeling sorry for yourself.
- Believe in yourself.
- Be grateful for what you have.

The Day of the African child

This year’s national celebrations for the Day of the African Child took place in Iganga District, under the theme “Accelerating Protection, Empowerment and Equal Opportunities for Children in Africa by 2030”.

It was organized by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development with support from development partners.

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports said: “Parents, take care of your children. Pack them some lunch. It’s everyone’s responsibility to protect children from violence and harmful practices including; child sacrifice, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and FGM/C.

In the children’s message read by Ryan Batakana, Iganga Boys’ PS, some forms of child abuse were highlighted, that includes child labour and child neglect.

KNOW YOUR BODY

Big Breasts

My breasts are bigger than those of my classmates. Am I normal?

Ann Napeyok, 12, Kotido District.

Dear Ann, you are normal and that is a sign that your body is growing well. Do not worry about your breast size. Our bodies develop differently.

Be proud of yourself. Dr Joel Lwasa, St. Charles Lungwa Hospital, Buikwe.
When you get defiled, do you begin your periods? 

Leticia Amuljen, St Andrew Kaggwa PS, Kampala.

Dear Leticia, there is no close relationship between defilement and periods. When a girl is defiled, she may sustain injuries in her private parts that leads to bleeding.

Which materials should be used for making sanitary pads? 

Karim, Anny, Nwoya PS.

Dear Karim, sanitary pads are made from either recycled textile material or cotton wool, paper fibre and other fabrics.

What should we do to prevent violence in schools? 

George Kisekka, St Mary’s PS.

Dear George, we need to find better ways of resolving conflict other than violence such as, dialogue, sports, music. Violent people usually have a low self-esteem. Activities that benefit their esteem would be good for them. Report any form of violence.

Is it that when I wear pads, I get wounds around my vagina? 

Veronica Hope, Sr. Miriam Duggan PS, Kampala.

Dear Hope, some people’s skin is sensitive to the material in sanitary pads. A change of brand is recommended. However, if symptoms persist seek medical advice.

What can one do if a relative wants to have sex with them? 

Girl, 16, Moroto KDA PS.

Dear girl, if someone is being forced by a relative to have sex, she or he should report that relative immediately. You can report to your teacher, parents, su-county councilor or Police. Do not keep quiet. Early sex can expose you to early pregnancy and STIDs including HIV/AIDS. Is it true that when a boy or man is circumcised, he will not be infected with sexually transmitted diseases? Sharon Aceng, 14, P5, Kangole Girls PS, Napak.

Dear Aceng, circumcision of boys and men is a good practice because it helps to reduce sexually transmitted infections. However, it does not completely remove the risk of catching them. Abstain from sex.

Why should girls bathe during their menstruation? 

Immaculate Nakisuuyi, P7, Buzibirra PS, Kamuli.

Dear Immaculate, it is hygienic to bathe regularly whether in periods or not. During periods, bathing regularly helps to prevent infections and bad smell.

Who should take ARVs? 

Medication? Angela Edith Sophie, P7, Kalotom PS, Napak.

Dear Angella, all people who test positive for the HIV virus and are advised to do so by their health care provider. Counselor: Dr. Joel Lwasa, Buikwe District.

Advice to Girl

In April 2017, a girl studying in Kamukuny Girls PS, Kaabong said: “There is a boy who usually disturbs me by asking for sex and that if I refuse, he will do it by force. What can I do?”

We received letters from you advising this girl. Thank you for the good advice.

Sandra Nansubuga, P7, Winterland PS, Wakiso, says: “Report him to the Senior man or woman teacher. You never know the boy has HIV and won’t infect you.”

Maurice Atuyambe, P6, Railway Children’s PS, Kampala, says: “Stay away from this boy because he is bad. Report him to Police.”

Manuella Ayen, 12, P7, Winterland PS, says: “Early sex will expose you to early pregnancy. Do not accept to have sex.”

Sandra Amino, 11, P6, Railway Children’s PS, Kampala says: “Talk to your parents or an elder you trust so that they can warn this boy.”

PUPILS OF OIMAI PS KATAKWI SAY: “Playing together keep our minds refreshed.”

PUPILS OF OIMAI PS KATAKWI SAY: We keep good friends. Say no to child marriage and stay in school.

What is Cancer and how do I know I have it? 

Shadia Nabwami, P6, Kasubi Modern PS.

Cancer is when abnormal cells occurring in the normal ones start to rapidly reproduce themselves. Normally, cells replace old or damaged cells.

This is not the case in cancer, unusual growths or swellings, unexplained wounds should be investigated by medical personnel.

Cancer attacks any part with living cells. Common cancers in children include; Lymphoma, Leukemia (cancer of the blood) and cancer of the Kidneys.

The real cause of cancer is not known but some factors that increase the risk of getting cancer include; HIV, radiations, tobacco, alcohol, family history of cancer, poor diet and lack of physical activity. Any abnormal wounds that fail to heal should be assessed by a medical personnel.

By Dr. Joel Lwasa, St Charles Lwanga Hospital, Buikwe.

Quiz

Sometimes, students are influenced by peers or decide to take alcohol. Based on an experience you know, explain the effects of alcohol consumption by young people and suggest solutions to prevent them from consuming it.

Write an essay of not more than 500 words in English. Clearly indicate your Name, Age, School Address and Telephone contact before 31st August 2017. Send your essay to Straight Talk Foundation, PO BOX 22366 KAMPALA.