Young people in Zambia: their lives and social contexts

This chapter marks a transition into the second half of the book, as we move from consideration of the establishment and organization of SfD to begin to focus on the people and communities with which SfD aims to work. Across the next three chapters the book aims to provide a detailed, empirically informed account of local Zambian contexts in which SfD is delivered, the experiences of those providing it, and the way in which local young people engage with and are affected by the SfD opportunities available to them. These chapters therefore continue the process evident in the previous empirical chapters, in which we progressively examined international, national and community-based manifestations of SfD. This localizing approach is now applied to understanding, in this chapter, the everyday-life contexts of young people in the Zambian communities we have worked in; in Chapter 5, how local SfD organizations address social issues in these communities and deliver their programmes; and in Chapter 6, how young people respond to this provision.

The purpose of this first ‘people-focused’ chapter is not, therefore, to directly examine SfD, but to develop an understanding of the social and development contexts within which young people in Zambia lead their everyday lives. It is intended to provide insight into how the development issues that SfD programmes aim to address are manifested at local level, and how they are perceived locally by adults and youths. To this end, the first section in this chapter considers the physical and institutional environments that shape opportunities for young people in Lusaka communities, and the second section examines the social relations in Zambian society which influence young people’s social position and their opportunities across their life course. The third section then applies these understandings to an analysis of the impact of HIV/AIDS on Zambian communities and young people’s experiences of both the pandemic and preventative interventions.

We place particular emphasis on local accounts of the social issues and challenges that young people in Zambian communities face. This emphasis on
obtaining local knowledge and perspectives is central to the overall methodological approach within the book. From the outset of our research in Zambia we have been conscious that Northern researchers in SfD are too often required to conduct their enquiries with only limited understandings of local and country-specific social and cultural contexts; although they may be well equipped with expert knowledge of development challenges from a global perspective, they may have little opportunity to explore how exactly this maps to specific localities and communities. In this chapter we address this by providing a necessarily compressed but nonetheless wide-ranging account of the social and cultural context of everyday life for the young people with whom SfD programmes seek to work.

We draw on published and documentary sources, but foreground the direct accounts of local community members. Rather than accepting external ideas about the type of ‘development’ that may be required, we therefore present local views, drawn from multiple standpoints. These come from a diverse range of adult interviewees, many with professional expertise and first-hand knowledge of local communities, and from a large number of young people interviewed over several years in multiple contexts. These two types of interviewees provide complementary but distinct perspectives. While adults provide commentaries on the issues affecting young people in their community, the views of young people provide insight into how members of the ‘target group’ for SfD programmes view their own situations.

Each section of the chapter integrates these data sources, first presenting published and adult perspectives on local issues, then examining how the views of young people compare and contrast with these. The priority given to the voices of young people is a counterbalance to concerns that young people’s perspectives have been subjugated in SfD policies, programmes and research. The chapter therefore provides an illustration of how an actor-orientated approach to analysis (Long, 2001) can bring together first-hand accounts with information drawn from other sources to allow a multifaceted understanding to emerge in which local perspectives are given primacy.

The chapter draws on several of our research projects. Adult interviewees include multiple representatives of the SfD sector and also representatives from community organizations, the latter especially drawn from our research in Chawama and Kamwala in 2009. The data from young people are similarly drawn from several of our studies; they include male and female interviewees from several Lusaka communities, with varying levels of engagement in SfD and aged from 10 to 28 years. This wide age range indicates the diversity of those
involved in SfD and reflects the fluidity and context specificity of notions of youth in Zambia and other African countries (Durham, 2000).

We have adopted informal research approaches in working with young people. Our interviews and focus groups have usually begun by asking respondents to speak about the Lusaka communities in which they live and/or work, allowing them to identify facets and issues that are most pertinent to them. Where appropriate, we have talked to them in pairs and small groups, and encouraged a dialogue rather than question/answer interviews. On some occasions, young people have been able to simultaneously talk and show us around their communities, and this produced particularly detailed conversations. Other informal time spent in communities throughout our visits to Zambia also informs our understanding of the issues in this chapter.

The parameters of everyday life: physical conditions and social provision in Lusaka communities

This first section focuses on the more tangible social conditions and institutions that frame young people’s everyday life in local communities. As has been shown in earlier chapters, both within the global movement and within Zambia specifically, SfD addresses multiple interconnected social issues. Common focuses include young people’s education, employability and health, and their general wellbeing in resource-poor environments. SfD is therefore dealing with aspects of young people’s lives that are influenced by wider policy and social provision, and these conditions are likely to have implications for how SfD organizations can work. In our work in Zambia we have therefore found it important to be able to place SfD in context – to obtain local accounts of, for example, the availability and quality of education for young people, and their prospects for employment. The section therefore aims to provide an overview of the wider social structures and institutions that influence the aspects of young people’s lives that SfD may address.

To understand the role that SfD can play in the lives of young people in Lusaka, we have found it important to first learn about the practical living conditions of their everyday lives. Many of the SfD activities delivered by the NGOs that we have worked with occur within Lusaka’s ‘compounds’: low-income areas that tend to exist on the outskirts, or the margins, of the city itself. It is within these well-recognized compounds where, of the 1.1 million inhabitants of Lusaka, ‘the majority inhabit substandard, overcrowded dwellings with inadequate, usually shared, services’ (Gough, 2008: 246). These conditions reflect the
origin of the compounds, as the term itself ‘derives from the urban-control apparatus that during the colonial period invoked race to segregate housing, labor, health, and domestic arrangements’ (Hansen, 2005: 6). To this day, the physical geography of Lusaka bears the ‘imprint of colonial urban planning’ whereby ‘land-use activities continue to be rigidly zoned’ (Hansen, 2005: 6). The built environment, and its ongoing development, reflects and reinforces inequalities in Zambia. Over the time that we have been travelling to Lusaka for this research, there have been significant changes to the physical infrastructure. These are perhaps most readily visible in the city centre and often relate to commercial developments as well as those resulting from foreign investment. This economic development has not, however, significantly benefitted the poorest in Zambian society, and the proportion of Zambians living beneath the poverty line changed little over a period of significant economic growth from 2006 to 2010 (Gentilini and Sumner, 2012). A common perception from adult interviewees, supported by Gough (2008), was also of overall increases in the cost of living in Lusaka and of ongoing deterioration in living conditions more generally for those in the compounds.

Compounds consist of a mass of tightly packed, small breeze-block homes, usually inhabited by a large number of family members. The view ‘from the sky’ that is possible via Google Earth is instructive in comparing a compound community such as Chawama (http://goo.gl/maps/N9x8n) with a relatively middle-class area such as Kamwala (http://goo.gl/maps/cSKwU), in which homes are significantly larger, mostly detached and often surrounded by small gardens. The irregular arrangement of dwellings in compound areas reflects the unplanned way in which building has occurred within these communities. As with many cities in Africa, it is the compounds in Lusaka that have accommodated, and borne the consequences of, the rural-to-urban mass migration that initially peaked when copper prices first collapsed in the 1970s (Central Statistical Office et al., 2009). Hansen (2005: 7) describes how, in all of the Lusaka compounds, ‘population expansion is accommodated on subdivided plots in a proliferation of rented rooms’, which has led to ‘the inevitable consequence [of] oppressive crowding’.

The infrastructure supporting the population in high-density compounds is often unable to cope. In contrast to more affluent areas in Lusaka, water is primarily by shared standpipe in compound areas. Supply of electricity is, at best, variable. Deterioration in service provision, as a result of economic conditions identified in Chapter 2, is illustrated by the lack of street lighting at night, despite the physical infrastructure for such provision remaining in place. In terms of
transport infrastructure, a compound such as Chawama is solely served by one main tarmac road together with a network of dirt thoroughfares, infrequently travelled by cars owing to their deeply uneven surfaces, which are gouged even further each rainy season.

The physical environment in which young people in Lusaka live is therefore quite strongly differentiated for those of different socio-economic circumstances. While those living within moderately affluent areas have access to reasonably reliable utilities, the lives of those in poorer compound communities is much more precarious. The ‘target group’ for SfD provision can be diverse, ranging from those living in conditions of acute poverty and hardship to those whose lives are more stable. One of the considerations for SfD may therefore be how, and indeed whether, its activities can have relevance to young people in such varied circumstances.

In addition to learning about the practical living conditions, it has been important to us to learn about the main social institutions with which young people engage. In relation to SfD in Lusaka, the most central of these is educational provision. As we have seen previously, education is both a development goal in itself and a mechanism through which wider development activities may be delivered and/or supported. At local level, there can therefore be multiple intersections between different aspects of ‘education’ and SfD, across its sport-for-development and sport-development forms. In Lusaka, for example, the Go Sisters programme run by the EduSport Foundation provided education scholarships to a small number of its participants, with the aim of directly increasing their education access and qualifications (i.e. individual development through sport); the II SfD programme worked with a range of government departments and the British Council to develop a national PE curriculum for schools (i.e. development of sport); while at community level, multiple SfD activities and programmes worked regularly with individual schools to access participants and host their sport-based activities. It has therefore been important for us to learn about the structures of education provision, its availability to young people and the issues surrounding access to it.

For young people in Zambia, national-level data and reports indicate some positive momentum in educational provision, but this is counteracted by a number of continued and significant challenges. Official statistics on primary-school enrolment have improved significantly since the turn of the century, from 71% of eligible children in 1999 to 91% in 2010, with the small gender gap being reversed in favour of girls by the end of this period (UNESCO, 2012). While enrolment in secondary school education has also increased, from 27% in 1999
to 72% in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012), there remains a significant problem in terms of pupil drop-out and non-completion of secondary education. Only 76% of the poorest children in Zambia complete primary school, compared with 92% of the richest pupils (UNESCO, 2012: 67), and completion rates of secondary education are particularly low, with only 22% of boys and 17% of girls completing their final grade 12 examinations. Again, these percentages are far lower for young people from compound communities (UNESCO, 2012).

If there has been some increase in educational enrolment, then the expansion of community schools, which are especially prominent in compound communities, has been a significant contributing factor (as recognized by the Ministry of Education, cited in UNDP, 2011). As described in Chapter 2, community schools complement, and address limitations of, education provision in government and private schools. However, community schools’ provision and facilities vary significantly, especially as they receive little (if any) state funding and are staffed by volunteers or low-paid community members. Those that we have visited have varied from a single breeze-block room to plots that encompassed a variety of classrooms, outdoor space earmarked for further building and small agricultural plots tended by pupils. Classes are frequently extremely large, with Zambia having an estimated 58 to 1 pupil–teacher ratio overall, far in excess of the recommended 35 to 1 (UNDP, 2011). As a result of these problems, the UNDP (2011: 56) reports that ‘the quality of education in Zambia is among the lowest in Southern Africa’.

Across countries in the global South, questions are commonly raised about the accuracy of development statistics, and it is notable that comments from adult interviewees suggest that actual attendance of young people at schools may be more problematic than the national enrolment data suggests. For example, two representatives of a church in Chawama commented:

Some, they go to school; others they don’t because they lack some means of support to go to school. Others, they just say, ‘Since I am an orphan, I don’t have anybody to support me.’

Most of them [young people] don’t go to school because of lack of [financial] support … some of them, they have reached high school but they can’t go to college or university because they have no support.

These reports of apparently lower engagement in school may be a reflection of localized variations that can be particularly marked in a compound such as Chawama. A further explanation could be that the official statistics measure enrolment rather than levels of attendance, as these interviewees spoke of.
Regardless of the specific reason, concerns about low attendance were widely expressed, with the financial difficulty of paying school fees and other costs of education, such as books and uniforms, also identified as a factor. Opportunity costs to parents of allowing their children to attend school were also identified by a head teacher:

The economic situation that is prevailing within our environment, because most of the parents that stay in Chawama, most of them don’t work, they depend on selling things at the market, so they use their children to raise money.

While such problems were undoubtedly greater in compound communities, difficulties affecting young people’s attendance at school were also evident in areas that are relatively more affluent, as described in one of the more middle-class areas we spent time in:

People in Kamwala, those who can, at least most of them, they can afford three meals in a day. Secondly, they can afford to send their children, out of five children, they can, at least, they can manage to send three of their children to school. (Staff member, SfD NGO)

Education therefore continues to be a problematic area of service provision in Zambia, and one which contributes to strong differentiation among young people. While many children and youths are benefitting from policies to improve school-based provision, a proportion of the poorest have limited access. The testimonies of adults suggest that these patterns of exclusion can be very localized, which has implications for how SfD engages with education at delivery level. Local expert knowledge about how education inequalities play out at community level may therefore be a valuable resource to SfD providers.

In development contexts, one of the key outcomes of education is employability. Under a neo-liberal agenda, employment is the basis of individuals’ economic security, and thus the central mechanism in development strategies to alleviate global poverty (Hayhurst, 2009). SfD is perhaps not as widely focused on immediate employment outcomes as it is on education ones, but nonetheless intersects with employment in multiple ways. In Zambia, SfD providers promoting school attendance to young people stress the importance of education as a route to employment. SfD can also provide specific opportunities for developing employability skills, through peer-leadership roles and internships, and some programmes have expanded the educational and training content of SfD programmes to include entrepreneurship and business skills (Hayhurst, 2014). All
of these activities illustrate the importance of employment as a possible outcome of SfD, making knowledge of national and local labour market conditions important to SfD design, delivery and impact.

Our evidence indicates that, as with education, opportunities for young people to gain employment are highly differentiated, and constrained for those living in the compounds. As in many African countries, high proportions of Zambians are employed in the informal sector, which accounts for around 70% of non-agricultural employment across the whole country (UNESCO, 2012). Gough (2008: 248) lists various ‘piecework’ jobs undertaken by men she interviewed: ‘loading and unloading trucks, moulding blocks, mending electrical equipment, assisting in the wiring of houses, digging pit latrines and so on.’ Economic activity, especially in the compounds, is otherwise centred on stalls in bustling markets selling food, clothing and other produce. Hansen (2010) identifies that such street vending has become a more common occupation for women, as family composition has changed and as they have increasingly sought (or been required) to contribute to household income.

Perspectives of community members support the findings of other authors who have considered the limited employment opportunities available to young people. Adult interviewees commented:

But once they finish … maybe at grade 9 or even grade 12, they have no job. They have no professional skill that can give them a job. So you find that, again, they become stranded in terms of employment. (Head teacher, community school, Chawama)

Even if you finish education you are still unemployed and it’s extremely difficult to find any employment … meaningful employment where you can realize your potential and you can advance in your education in your … area of expertise. (Church representative, Misisi)

Similarly, Gough (2008) recognizes that the few formal employment opportunities are often only available to those young people with influential family or social connections. As Hansen (2005) noted, one consequence of the lack of long-term or meaningful employment for young people is that many are unlikely to leave their compound communities and social mobility, more generally, is limited.

Once again, the knowledge of adults with long-standing connections to Lusaka communities has proved illuminating in going beyond national data to explain the challenges that young people face in gaining employment. This detailed knowledge of local context also proves valuable when other, less formal, aspects of compound life are considered. Beyond the lack of opportunities...
for education and employment, many community interviewees spoke of the limitations in formal or informal recreational opportunities available to young people. If the lack of such opportunities had been one driver contributing to the establishment of SfD NGOs (see Chapter 2), the deterioration of recreational facilities was also a common concern across different communities:

The first challenge that I have for the youths is recreation; lack of recreation facilities. This used to be a play park. It became dilapidated. It was tending to a place where they were throwing rubbish. (Staff member, centre for homeless children, Kamwala)

But in terms of community recreation facilities, [they] are not just there. The local authorities actually have not that much. Where there used to be community recreations, now you will find the bus [station], or they have allocated it to somebody who can build a house. (Staff member, NGO, Kamwala)

If you look at the recreational facilities in this community, there is none … children’s play parks are no longer in existence; there used to be. (Head teacher, community school, Chawama)

These interviewees drew attention to the detrimental effect of urbanization on recreational facilities, as Akindes and Kirwan (2009) have also commented on in relation to sports facilities in other African locations. Often, what solely remain in compound communities are barren, dirt-covered, grass-free areas that sometimes have football goals and, in fewer cases, netball posts. These areas often remain under threat of further building and/or vandalism; even in the middle-class area of Kamwala, locals complained to us that football goalposts had been stolen so that they could be sold for scrap metal.

In contrast to the lack of positive recreational provision, many adult community members also complained that the only type of social amenity that was increasing in number was public bars. A representative of an SfD organization articulated a common comment of many interviewees that ‘if you look around Chawama, I am sure you have noticed that there are a lot of taverns [where] a house is being turned into a tavern’. There was a widely held view that young people would drink in bars or other informal community spaces through lack of productive alternatives:

So as a result [of lack of employment], you have so many young people playing around in bars, drinking alcohol, because they have nowhere to go. We don’t have these facilities, hence they indulge in beer drinking and other sorts of things. There are no recreation facilities around … As a result, the young people are involved in illicit behaviour. (Teacher, community school, Chawama)
Gough’s (2008: 247) study of life in Kalingalinga, a compound which has been the site of much SfD activity, also reported community members bemoaning ‘boys and girls just sitting at home with nothing to do … young people have a lot of idle time and they indulge in drinking and robberies’.

The many adult interviewees we have been able to consult have therefore provided detailed accounts of the day-to-day living conditions and wider structural factors influencing young people. When we now turn to our various discussions with young people themselves, it becomes evident that their views often align with the accounts of problematic issues discussed so far in this section. Young people also, however, provided additional and sometimes different perspectives on how they experience everyday life. This female peer leader from Chawama, for example, was very similar to our adult interviewees in her views on education and employment issues:

There is high unemployment; you find that you leave school and then you want to do something but you can’t get a job. Even those who reach college level, they don’t have a job … if you are working it is usually because they know someone and will get a job through that person.

Like the adult interviewees, young people also spoke about the lack of opportunities in their communities and the resultant consequences. They spoke of young people in these environments suffering from limited things to do, boredom and a resultant lack of purpose in their lives. This reinforces the point previously made, about the potential value of sporting activities for simply occupying young people and providing them with something to do. Young people’s views on the value of participation in sport, independent of any development outcomes, is a theme we return to in Chapter 6.

However, what was notable was that in giving such accounts young people often spoke in a general way and referred to other young people. They often contrasted these wider perspectives with more specific and complex reflections on their own lives and views. Despite their wider concerns, many spoke positively of their aspirations and felt that, in comparison with others, their future would be different:

Right now, I stand on my rights and my values. That is what keeps me moving in life. I keep on because I know something is ahead of me. (Female peer leader, Kabwata)

Although many young people were struggling to complete formal schooling, they still spoke of high expectations for their future careers that were perhaps
not reflective of the actuality of their everyday lives. Education was highly valued by young people, as they felt that this would help them achieve their employment aspirations, as well as enabling a route out of poverty more generally. Young people talked of aspirations to become doctors, lawyers, accountants and teachers. Some discussed wanting to do work ‘with paper’, a role distinct from the manual work undertaken by those employed within their communities. Many remained optimistic regarding their future, as well as holding a level of belief that they could still achieve their ambitions, which they perceived as realistic. However, there are some contrasts with the views of young women having more long-standing and first-hand experience of the limited opportunities available to them. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 6, and again reinforces how different young people’s individual perspectives can be.

Interestingly, young people’s views on broader dimensions of their own compounds varied. A number of young people talked about their communities as being places where they were happy living. It was clear they had strong associations and social ties within them. Many talked about their compounds as places that had many challenges, but they were still ‘home’ and somewhere young people felt deeply connected to. They did not necessarily feel they ‘were stuck’ in the compounds, as other studies of youth in Lusaka suggest (Hansen, 1997, 2005). Young people also often portrayed a deep desire to create positive change within their own communities. In explaining such positive views, it may be particularly relevant that the young people that were interviewed were all involved in SfD activities that centred on trying to achieve such social change. These young people recognized that their optimism and positive views of communities were not shared by others in their communities. For example, one young person spoke of the lack of belief amongst other young people that they could change their circumstances and, as a result, had low future aspirations for themselves:

[They] do not have the ability or the power to decide what they want. They have no goals in life, they just want to live blindly day to day to day. They just live for today, not thinking about tomorrow or the future … they have nothing in their lives. (Female peer leader, Kabwata)

It is also possible to recognize more critical perspectives from those young people who had been able to gain positive experiences outside their own communities. Young people who, through various SfD activities, have had opportunities for national and international travel described being less content because
of a growing awareness of what they felt their compound was lacking. These young people were more likely to discuss wanting to leave compound life:

That is where I was born and brought up and hopefully I will die somewhere else! I want to get out of Chawama so I can experience different lifestyles. (Female peer leader, Chawama)

This is where I have grown up, but if I get a job I will move out. (Female peer leader, Kalingalinga)

While such comments retain the level of aspiration identified amongst other young people, they also indicate that young people's perspectives are by no means homogeneous and reflect different aspects of their backgrounds and experiences. This diversity of views highlights the importance of understanding different, localized, interpretations of what otherwise may appear to be uniformly structured contexts. These data also begin to indicate how young people's perspectives of the contexts within which they live may be reflected in, and shaped by, involvement in SfD.

This section has brought together the views of adults and young people on some of the key conditions that circumscribe young people's current lives and future possibilities. We have found the detail provided valuable and relevant to our efforts to understand how SfD might operate in these local contexts. We have also been encouraged by how the information obtained from adults and young people has been complementary and synergistic. On the one hand, these accounts confirm that there is strong local recognition of development challenges in education and employment, and arising from everyday living conditions. On the other, they have identified greater differentiation in young people's situations and responses than we would otherwise have recognized. In the next section we therefore explore further how young people interact with these environments, by shifting the focus from social institutions to social relations.

Young people and social relations in Zambia

The purpose of the previous section was to provide an overview of the key physical conditions and aspects of social provision which have a bearing on young Zambians' everyday lives. The commentaries from young people, especially towards the end of the section, were a reminder of the importance of recognizing individual agency within such contexts. In this section, our focus is on these more dynamic aspects of how young people live their everyday lives.
We address a further set of influences – key social relationships and relations that influence young Zambians. We focus on a number of dimensions: family, peer groups and associational life, and the intersection of these with constructions of gender.

By first considering ‘family’, we are addressing the most widespread and immediate social network for young people. In Zambia, as elsewhere, family composition, practices and ideologies all significantly affect young people’s lives and this influence is recognized in the work of many SfD organizations. In Lusaka, for example, the Go Sisters programme works specifically with parents to encourage them to allow their daughters to participate in the programme. Families are also seen as conduits for promoting social change – for example by supporting their children’s education – and, conversely, as potential barriers to it. Despite this, detailed empirical accounts of family relationships remain extremely rare in the SfD literature (Kay and Spaaij, 2012). As a social structure, the family in Zambia has undergone considerable and sometimes dramatic change. The traditional conceptualization of family is of the ‘extended family’, including aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents (Gough, 2008). Extended families were traditionally the central supportive social structure in Zambian life. However, the dual and combined influences of economic conditions and the HIV/AIDS pandemic have contributed to extended family structures breaking down, especially in urban areas such as Lusaka (Gough, 2008). Largely as a consequence of deaths associated with AIDS and other diseases, estimates suggest that there are 1.3 million orphans or similarly vulnerable children in Zambia (UNDP/Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2011). Combined with wider economic conditions, Gough (2008) identifies increasing flexibility in household composition in Zambia, with an increasingly large proportion of children being either temporarily or permanently raised not by their parents but by other relatives. Specifically in the Lusaka compound of Kalingalinga, Hansen’s (2005: 14) research identified the prevalence of:

unconventional household arrangements, including domestic groups of youth with no adult head as provider – households consisting entirely of young men, or of young women, or of siblings, and child-headed households, or households of children with a granny caretaker, for whom the children may actually be providing.

For many of our adult interviewees, changes to the extended family system were a source of great concern. The following comments from a community
representative in Kamwala and a member of staff from an SfD NGO respectively were typical in identifying and expressing anxiety about the consequences of these changes for young people:

We have of late noticed that; we Africans believed in the extended relationship, which is dying slowly because of the economic crisis. People are shying backwards to assist because they don't have enough to supplement other children. So, as a result, these children are running onto the streets.

Because of the HIV pandemic, many children are running their lives on their own, so that is why there are a lot of children on the streets. Nuclear family now is not here because a lot of children have no parents. So, one home out of seven there is only one [parent] living and the rest are children … so people have very big families, so when parents die they are on their own.

Changes in family structures and household composition can have varied consequences. Many of our interviewees, particularly in the more middle-class community of Kamwala, recounted stories of families who were forced to sell, rent and move out of homes after a senior member of the household had died. Amongst such families, residential and social mobility was largely downward to poorer housing and compounds, as also observed by Gough (2008). In Kamwala especially, community members spoke of their perception of eroding community cohesion and trust as a result of the ongoing movement of families into and out of the community.

These perspectives from Kamwala contrasted with accounts we received about the more deprived community of Chawama. Here, the dominant narrative to emerge was about a continuing ethos of community support. One community member indicated:

As you see, the population here in Chawama is growing because we have got some parents who died because of this pandemic of AIDS, HIV/AIDS. And they leave orphans. And we, as the community, have to look after those orphans. We support them through. Sometimes we might help them with books, supporting them at school. I think that has not really changed. We work together, yes. (Community representative, SfD NGO)

Noyoo (2008) cites Zambian people and communities as being friendly and resilient in the face of adversity, a characteristic we particularly noticed amongst young Zambians who have been significantly and directly affected by changes in family and household structures. In a variety of ways, children and young people have to take on significant responsibilities to contribute to the functioning of the household and family. As well as having to take responsibility for
either older relatives or younger siblings, earning money to support families was also a priority for some young people. Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, Robson et al. (2006) have similarly identified the importance to young people of supporting their families.

Family and economic pressures also affected the possibilities of some young people attending school:

Some of the challenges that we normally have, some parents are not very supportive and they are not helpful. You will find that you bring the children together to educate them, but the time with the parents, they want to send them to sell groundnuts and things. That is some of the problems that we normally face as a community. (Head teacher, community school, Chawama)

Some interviewees also described the extreme measures that families were driven to in response to the poverty that they experienced:

Then there are some parents, they encourage children to do prostitution because maybe that is where they raise money, that type of things. This really happens here within the community. They are bread and butter through prostitution. Those are some of the problems that we face. (Head teacher, community school, Chawama)

Adults’ accounts, therefore, indicate the ways in which young people’s families may constrain their choices as a result of the social and economic pressures to which they are subject. Policy rhetoric that positions young people as gaining increasing status and driving social change within African societies sits uncomfortably with traditional and continuing social norms, in Zambia and in other African countries, which reinforce expectations that young people ‘show high levels of unquestionable respect for adults’ (Svenson and Burke, 2005: 30). As a result, traditional positions of adult privilege are generally maintained and young people continue to face ‘considerable hurdles to participating in the economic, social and political spheres’ (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2009: 7).

Families are also influential as sources of strongly gendered norms that characterize Zambian society in the private and public spheres. Traditional perspectives regarding gender are deeply embedded across different aspects of Zambian culture, as the following comment from an SfD NGO worker somewhat contradictorily, but strongly, indicates:

The relationship with boys and girls is more cultural than religion. Even the bible says, though, the man is more superior than the girls in a given situation. It strongly states that the girl should be submissive.
Such traditional views of gender have meant that girls and young women have often had far greater responsibilities in their households than male family members. Cultural norms regarding gender, combined with the breakdown of family structures in some cases, differentially affected access to education amongst girls:

You find girls of about 12 years old are heading families because everyone else has died. So if there is a boy and a girl, the boy will go to school but the girl will have to look after the family at home. (Staff member, SfD NGO)

The roles that women have undertaken meant that they were, however, valued by many interviewees as playing a significant role in maintaining extended families and community cohesion. This perspective was mentioned in relation to adult women rather than to girls:

The women, I think that it is a big effect in Chawama community. So, most of the time we find the women are in the forefront of finding things that we can keep up in everyday life. For example, maybe we find that the husband is not working and she has children, and those children need to go to school, they need food. And the woman is there fighting for those children. It is really affecting the women here in Chawama. (Community representative, SfD NGO)

Our adult interviewees also expressed concerns about some other aspects of young people’s ‘associational lives’ in Lusaka communities. While religious belief is strongly evident in Zambian society and churches often run programmes of activities for young people, few adult interviewees spoke of churches occupying a significant place in the lives of young people. Instead, they commonly expressed anxiety about alcohol and drug abuse amongst young people:

The big problem we have in African countries is substance abuse. But here is getting very bad; they can’t live without alcohol, especially these young ones … So people are now abusing drugs from a very tender age. … So you wonder where this generation is heading to. (Teacher, government secondary school, Munali)

Such perspectives align with wider concerns expressed about moral decay amongst Zambian young people (Locke and Lintelo, 2012). Our adult interviewees also echoed Gough’s (2008) recognition of communal and associational dimensions of alcohol and drug abuse, with young people pooling their money to engage in such activities.
The data obtained from young people provides a valuable complement to the views expressed by adults. Young people involved in interviews and focus groups offered nuanced accounts both of the influences of peer groups and in respect of other issues identified thus far in this section. Friendships and networks with peers within their communities were recognized as important influences by young people. Some did discuss the negative impact that ‘immoral’ friends could have on young people’s behaviour:

When your friends are lazy and they just sit and drink all the time and do bad things, it is very hard for you not to do the same. (Female peer leader, Chawama)

I get pressure, but it depends on how you handle that pressure and the choices you make. I decide to keep away from people like that. I feel I am strong enough to stay away from people who might make me behave immorally. (Male participant, Kamwala)

Another young person spoke of the need to, and benefits of, associating with ‘good friends’:

We need to play safe. You have to know which friends you are going to join because there are friends that are bad, they encourage you to do bad things. You have to at least be having good friends, which encourages you to do good things so it’s very important. (Female participant, Lusaka)

Similar perspectives were given by other young people, who identified the importance of friendships for discussing problems and challenges within young people’s lives, for gaining advice, and for providing general social support that helped young people remain optimistic and hopeful:

We listen to one another; it is good being together – we’ve known one another for a long time and I know [she] will always tell me the truth. (Female participant, Chibolya)

You go first to [your family] and get information, and then you talk to your friends … and then you know if it is true, if you have asked different people. (Female participant, Kamwala)

This second quote also emphasizes the importance of family to many of the young people. Again, young people spoke of their own and others’ families in diverse ways:

Like, the way it is here, everything is done by family. Like, every decision you make you have to think of your family. ’Cause, like, I can say that is how it is.
We are more like connected. Just like I said, whatever we do, we look at the wellbeing of the family. (Female peer leader, Kabulonga)

Definitely you have to listen to your parents … your parents know more than you – you have to listen to them because they will tell you what is right … they know more than me, so they will always tell me the right thing. (Male participant, Kamwala)

Yes, I have to work and try and pay for my school fees, but also to help my mother with the family. Once I have some money I can go back to school. My father died three years ago and my mother needs the help with money. (Female participant, Kamwala)

In Africa, once your parents send you to school they expect you to help them in return. (Female participant, Kalingalinga)

Such quotes indicate levels of mutual and collective support within the families of the young people we spoke to. Most of these young people reflected fondly on their families and saw adult family influences as significant motivators within their lives. However, they recognized that such supportive family contexts were not the experience of many young people. They talked about ‘dysfunctional families’ that were plagued by domestic violence towards women and girls and those in which parents or older adults would encourage, or at least tolerate, substance abuse. The quotes presented earlier also appear to indicate slightly different perspectives on the roles young people often take in supporting other and older family members. It was important to young people that they supported their family as well as they could, but they also felt a particular weight of expectation that they would have to look after their parents or older family members as they began to experience deteriorations in health. Interviewees also identified families in which young people were forced to turn to prostitution, in the case of young women, and crime, in the case of young men, in order to support their families.

These perspectives also indicate the hierarchical dimensions of family structures. Young people who lived in traditional family units spoke of their fathers as exercising most authority within the home. This gendered dimension of family structures was also represented in the views of young women and girls, who felt the expectations to fulfil supportive roles most acutely:

Girls we are workers at home. Working vessels like the bible says. So we only say something when someone has said, ‘Can you say something?’ … that is what culture says. (Female peer leader, Chawama)

Similar to Gough (2008), accounts of daily life given by girls and young women told of rising early and undertaking household tasks including assisting with
cooking and cleaning, and helping other family members get ready for their day. Especially if they were able to go to school, girls and young women were left with limited time that was their own, with requirements to support older family members in the mornings and evenings providing the main structure to their daily lives.

Beyond the home, young people talked about the challenges that young women faced in managing relationship dynamics with young men, the difficulties of saying no to male requests, and also the pressure to be married and in a stable relationship as soon as possible:

> It is different, you can't tell the man what to do. He tells you what to do. … I think, for us, we can't tell the man what to do because he is the one who provides money, he does everything. You just keep quiet – you have to give respect to him. He can beat you up if you say anything; he will say, 'I bring money, I do this.' We don't have much power. Some men do respect women, but some they don't at all. (Female peer leader, Kalingalinga)

> When they [men] beat you up or they give you money, it is harder to say no. (Female participant, Kalingalinga)

Whilst some of the young people interviewed felt that traditional gender dynamics were beginning to change, with women having more of a say in society, they still acknowledged the limited influence and power that women had within public spheres in their own communities. Such gender relations are significant when considering constraints on female health behaviour in relation to sport and HIV/AIDS education, as discussed in the next section as well as in Chapter 6 when we consider gender empowerment through sport.

Beyond their families, young people also often spoke about the limited status that they felt they had within their local communities. Young people indicated that they felt disempowered and ignored in the context of their communities, and this was a continual source of frustration:

> What really kills the Zambian culture is that adults think they can do it, but they also need the youths to help them out. … I have never seen anything like that, calling upon the youths to make decisions … it is adult driven, and then youths are completely eliminated from decision making. (Female peer leader, Kabwata)

This quote speaks of a commonly expressed desire amongst young people to promote change in their local community. However, young people felt they had little opportunity to shape the development of their community and generally
had very limited contact with adults who had access to transformative power sources:

**RESPONDENT:** The councillors make decisions and even the people from the churches, those older people ...(Female peer leader, Kabwata)

**INTERVIEWER:** And does he [the chairman] interact much with young people? Does he talk with young people?

**RESPONDENT:** No, he doesn't.

Overall, this section has indicated some of the significant challenges affecting young people in Lusaka communities, and the ways in which they may be particularly affected both by long-standing social hierarchies and by more recent social changes. However, the section also points to the need to avoid generalizations about such influences, and indicates the different ways in which continuities and changes in Zambian society can be experienced in different communities, according to gender and by individual young people. Such variation will also be a feature of the subsequent section, in which the effects of HIV/AIDS across Zambia, particularly for young people, are considered.

**Young people and HIV/AIDS in Zambia**

This final section now applies the actor-oriented approach to the specific context of HIV/AIDS. The previous chapters have gone some way to explain the prominence that HIV/AIDS has in development contexts, both within and outside the SfD movement. To complement this, we now examine the challenges that HIV/AIDS poses to Zambian youth, from the perspectives of adults and young people. By presenting these views, we aim to contextualize the work undertaken by Zambian SfD NGOs to address the pandemic.

It is helpful to first re-emphasize the impact that HIV/AIDS has had across Zambia. In recent years overall levels of infection have been in decline, as they have been in neighbouring countries. When first formally measured in 1991–92, however, almost a quarter of the adult population in Zambia were infected with the virus (UNDP, 2011). Since then, the prevalence of HIV amongst 15- to 49-year-olds decreased to 16% by 2002 and dropped further to an estimated 12.9% by 2011 (UNAIDS, 2012). Nevertheless, the impact of the disease remains hugely significant, with an estimated 970,000 Zambians living with HIV, of whom 170,000 are children. AIDS-related deaths number 31,000 annually, and it has been estimated that 2.8 million people will have died in Zambia of
AIDS-related causes by 2015 (UNDP, 2011). The pandemic has already orphaned 680,000 Zambian children.

Women and girls have been particularly affected by HIV/AIDS, with the HIV prevalence rate amongst women aged between 15 and 24 years standing at 7%, more than double the 3.1% rate amongst men of the same age (UNAIDS, 2012). HIV infection is also differentially distributed on a geographical basis throughout the country, with the highest incidence rates in urban areas and particularly the capital, Lusaka, where the majority of our SfD research has been undertaken. Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (Central Statistical Office, 2007) indicated that HIV prevalence was higher amongst Zambians with higher levels of education, those currently in employment and those with above average wealth. At the very least, these distinctions indicate that HIV/AIDS has affected the whole of Zambian society. As Gough observes:

Few families (in Lusaka) have been unaffected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Those who would normally be the breadwinners are succumbing to HIV/AIDS resulting in the elderly looking after the young, orphans being catered for by other family members, and youth headed households. (Gough, 2008: 246)

In considering the factors that contribute to HIV infection amongst young people, the focus of this section is on sexual behaviours and the factors that influence these behaviours. The importance placed on sexual behaviours both in the literature and by our community interviewees reflects the fact that heterosexual intercourse is by far the most common form of transmission for young people in Zambia (NAC, 2010). Influences on young people’s sexual behaviour are complex, as Magnani et al. emphasize:

Sexual and reproductive health related behaviour of youth in Lusaka are influenced in important ways by a myriad of factors. Some of these are characteristics of adolescents themselves, while others are characteristics of the environment in which they are embedded. (Magnani et al., 2002: 83)

There are relatively few other Zambian studies that examine the range of factors that influence young people’s sexual behaviour and HIV infection. Both Kalunde (1997) and, more recently, Nshindano and Maharaj (2008) focus on the attitudes of young people. Reinforcing studies from other locations in southern Africa, these researchers identify a degree of negligence on the part of Zambian youth. Kalunde (1997) notes an attitude of ‘youth infallibility’ which both bears similarities and contrasts with Nshindano and Maharaj’s (2008: 40) finding that
young Zambians have a ‘fatalistic attitude’ towards the risk of HIV infection due to a belief that the disease would ‘claim the lives of all people so it did not matter whether they contracted it now or later’. Amongst Zambian university students, such attitudes manifested themselves in broad acceptance of multiple partnerships and concurrent relationships (Nshindano and Maharaj, 2008). These authors also identify a gendered dimension to attitudes and sexual behaviours. Young men were found to ‘feel considerable pressure to conform to the stereotypical [sexual] behaviour generally expected of them’ (ibid.: 40). Meanwhile, the opportunity for young women to engage in transactional sexual behaviours for which they received ‘material benefits’ such as gifts was, as in other sub-Saharan countries, ‘a major factor inhibiting behaviour change’ (ibid.). In addition, the Zambian NAC identifies a wider range of factors that contribute to the disproportionate rates of HIV infection amongst women, including: ‘high levels of social and economic vulnerability, inadequate access to life skills and information, low levels of negotiation skills, and unequal protection under statutory and customary laws and traditions’ (NAC, 2006: 8).

Literature from Zambia and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa considers intervention approaches to addressing HIV/AIDS. Commonly, research has questioned the impact of HIV prevention interventions. For example, Campbell et al. (2005) highlight the limitations of interventions that are not orientated towards the social contexts in which young people live and that do not seek to develop environments that are more socially supportive of safer sexual behaviours. In respect of Zambia in particular, Magnani et al. comment:

Because of the sizeable number and diverse nature of factors influencing adolescents’ behaviours, it is unlikely that a single, easy to implement intervention will provide a solution to the high rates of HIV/AIDS infection among adolescents in Zambia. (Magnani et al., 2002: 84)

They conclude that programmes need to operate at a community level, and focus on specific protective behaviours rather than general education, in order to change ‘social norms and values surrounding adolescent reproductive health behaviours’ (ibid.). Amongst these social norms and values, these authors urge a particular focus on the repressive gender practices affecting the capacity of both young men and young women to engage in safe sexual behaviour.

Zambian HIV/AIDS interventions targeting young people have, however, largely been underpinned by the ‘ABC’, or ‘abstinence, be faithful, use a condom’, approach. Interventions tend to emphasize knowledge acquisition around these areas (Magnani et al., 2002). All three preventative strategies are
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fraught with challenges. Previous studies from various sub-Saharan countries have suggested that abstaining is not a realistic or sustainable choice for many young people (Meekers and Calves, 1997). Similarly, studies suggest that condom use may be sporadic, with young people having difficulty accessing condoms, being unsure how to use them, and feeling unable or insecure about negotiating their use with partners (MacPhail and Campbell, 2001; James et al., 2004; Pettifor et al., 2005). Both young men and young women can interpret asking a partner to use a condom as a lack of trust (Varga, 1999), whilst, as indicated earlier, young women engaging in transactional sexual activities are likely to have limited bargaining power to negotiate these encounters safely (Stephenson, 2009).

Our adult interviewees’ reflections on HIV/AIDS and young people’s lives echoed several of the themes from the literature. Two teachers referred to a noticeable degree of intergenerational differences and expressed concerns about the attitudes of young people as a whole:

This generation, they are so energetic – they want to do everything, they want to experiment. When they hear something they want to try it … when you ask these boys, most of them will have had sex … These days sex is an open thing – you go into class and ask how many people have had sex, they shy away, but you just have to open up. So, as a teacher, you have to say, ‘Look, I know most of you have had sex,’ and you have to say, ‘I hope when you are having sex you are using a condom.’ (Teacher, community school, Kamwala)

The more you give them time to be free, that is the time they use to engage themselves in promiscuous activities. Alcohol abuse and substance abuse … this will lead them to immoral behaviour because they don’t know what they are doing; the man will take advantage and they get pregnant, which is a trend now – teenage mothers. (Teacher, community school, Kamwala)

The association between alcohol and drug abuse and risky sexual activity was a common theme across a range of adult interviews. For some adult community members, young people’s ‘immoral behaviours’ reflected limited opportunities for productive use of time, as Zambian SfD representatives also spoke of in Njelesani and colleagues’ (2014) research. This point was sometimes phrased in religious parlance: ‘an idle mind is the devil’s workshop’. Several interviewees suggested that additional factors affected young women:

When a female has no activity, no employment, what do they do? They go into abuse of alcohol and, end result, they end up being prostituting, which is not fair. (Staff member, youth employment organization, Chawama)
The girls, sometimes they may have problems – maybe they don't have money, they come from poor families – so in the end they would like to have a boyfriend, so that they can be given money to do other things or to buy things for themselves. (Teacher, community school, Chawama)

Girls are also a victim in the society because, due to desperation, they go to look for men. Not because they have high sexual desire, no. They don't even have the desire. They want to exchange their bodies for money. But the end result is they are contracting a disease. (Community representative, Kamwala)

The girls are the most affected by HIV/AIDS; a woman has no say in sex. A girl child is also abused in that way, many children are abused by relatives; I'm talking about a girl child, they will be abused by relatives in the home, and when it is in the home it is dealt with at a family level. Normally it would go to court, but the family wouldn't want that – they would not want to break up the family. (Staff member, SfD NGO)

Such comments highlight how women's and girls' increased risk of HIV infection is affected by multiple interrelated factors, including gender inequality, poverty, lack of employment, family circumstances and abuse.

The views that adults expressed were echoed in many of the contributions from young people. Throughout our research, the young men and women we spoke to proved to be invaluable informants, willing to talk unselfconsciously about HIV/AIDS and its impact of their local community, and to share their views on the factors contributing to the spread of the virus. Many young people talked about the disruption and devastation that HIV/AIDS had caused family units, as well as how it had taken the lives of many educated and skilled adults in their community. However, whilst happy to talk about HIV in impersonal terms, it was evident that there was still a certain stigma attached to the virus. It was rare in interviews and focus groups for a young person to refer to their own experience of living with family members with the virus; even if a family member had died, young people tended to talk about their final illness rather than directly name HIV/AIDS. It was also notable that no young people self-disclosed to us as having HIV themselves. Given the prevalence rates, it is likely that the virus had infected some of the young people we have spoken with, although they may not necessarily have been aware of it.

As well as speaking impersonally, young people also commonly spoke in externalizing ways, which explained the risk and circumstances of HIV infection amongst other, unnamed, young people in their communities. There was also a moral dimension in some young people's explanation of HIV infection. For example, while most of the young people we spoke to agreed that abstinence
from sex was a difficult strategy for many young people, they tended to refer to those who did not abstain as ‘foolish’ and ‘lacking in self-discipline’. Interviewees also strongly highlighted the influence of family in shaping young people’s values and beliefs towards HIV/AIDS and risk. Rather than being spoken of as important sources of advice and information on HIV/AIDS, young people more often talked about parents instilling particular morals and values that made them less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour:

It matters what sort of background they have or what sort of parents they have. If there is some sort of disorder in the house, most of the children will grow up in the same manner as their parents because those are our sort of influences. You have to have parents with good morals and then you learn good morals. That is what your influences are. (Male participant, Kamwala)

Such comments have resonance with young people’s recognition of ‘dysfunctional’ families, referred to earlier in the chapter. The young people we spoke to felt that others were more inclined to expose themselves to risk if their parents were absent or appeared not to care about their children’s behaviour.

Perspectives of young people also reflected issues of peer pressure, lack of opportunity and fatalism that our adult interviewees had also mentioned and that are referred to in the literature. Again, young people distanced themselves personally from these positions, yet talked about their peers as generally lacking in hope or purpose and, as such, placing limited value on looking after themselves:

Some youth, they think there is no future, so it doesn’t matter if they get these diseases because there is nothing for them to be. (Female participant, Munali)

Other young people hinted that rather than being resigned to contracting HIV/AIDS, some of their peers did not consider themselves to be at risk:

You can say to that young man he needs to use a condom, but if thinks he is not going to catch anything he will think, ‘Why should I bother?’ (Male participant, Kamwala)

Both peer pressure and, in some cases, power relations were also considered by young people as important factors that significantly influenced sexual behaviours. Again, women were described by young people as having limited agency in determining their sexual behaviours. Without, again, disclosing anything of their own behaviours, young women spoke explicitly and specifically about
others in their community engaging in sex in return for ‘desirable goods’ that young men may give them:

Some girls want things like soap to take care of themselves; others now, though, want more. They will have sex with a man if he has a car and will drive them around and take them places they need to go to. (Female peer leader, Kalingalinga)

Beyond the adult views expressed earlier, what was evident from interviews with young people was their exposure to education on HIV/AIDS from an array of sources. Those that were attending school discussed the integration of HIV/AIDS education within various taught subjects as well as the establishment of extracurricular ‘anti-AIDS’ clubs that young people could attend. Outside school, young people often experienced HIV/AIDS education in different settings:

Yes, I think now it is everywhere; it is not just at school, it is not just at coaching, even at church we have meetings and we discuss it. (Male participant, Kabulonga)

Many of the young people we spoke with were not only involved with SfD NGOs but also, concurrently, with development-orientated organizations and activities in a number of these different settings. Whether young people with less supportive families and peers were doing likewise was, however, difficult to determine.

Importantly, young people also spoke of the types of information they received about HIV/AIDS, the sources of this information and their own perception of the efficacy of these messages. From our initial visit to Zambia, young people spoke of the prevalence of messages regarding the value of abstinence and avoidance of what the messages suggested to be promiscuous sexual behaviour before marriage:

Yes, they teach us we have to abstain in our lives – you can get HIV, you can die – so we know you don’t have to die, you have to respect yourself. Abstaining is what we do, but some don’t. (Female participant, Kamwala)

However, there was also evidence of other messages regarding the importance of HIV/AIDS testing:

Because there are others who do not know, and they teach us because there are some girls who sleep with people a long time ago and they don’t know if they
are infected. So they teach us where we can get tested and that you must get tested. (Female participant, Chibolya)

A number of those interviewed on our first visit to Zambia considered that the scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic was due to young people simply ignoring the information they were told:

HIV/AIDS is now all over; when someone tells you not to do something you have to not do it. But when you try to tell your friend this is not good, this is bad then. But sometimes they want to be bad. (Female participant, Chibolya)

Yes some still ignore it though – they sit just playing, they don't listen and when the teacher asks what he has explained they can't answer, they can't explain … they just ignore the teacher and say, 'We don't need to know.' (Male participant, Chibolya)

There were also indications that adults in formal positions were not necessarily trusted sources of information:

Like, when the teacher is talking, some people go, 'She is lying, she doesn't know what she is talking about.' (Female participant, Kamwala)

Moreover, some girls and young women tended to present a perspective that boys were generally less inclined to listen to the HIV/AIDS education than they were:

Boys don't learn the message – they think they don't get HIV/AIDS. They can't be careful with what they have. They just spread it. Sometimes even if they know they have it, they spread it … everywhere we tell them but they don't understand, they don't listen. (Female participant, Chibolya)

Thus, while young people commonly experience HIV/AIDS education, their perspectives indicated that the impact of this may often be limited. We will consider the relevance of this for the activities of SfD NGOs and their potential impact across the following two chapters. Overall, young people and adults recognized different ways in which societal influences shaped behaviours that could contribute to the risk of HIV infection. The conclusion to the chapter will attempt to draw together some of the interrelationships between broader social structures, HIV/AIDS, and the perspectives and behaviours of young people in Zambian communities.
Conclusions

This chapter has drawn on multiple sources, combining detailed local accounts from adults and young people with published data and literature on Zambian society. With SfD organizations in Zambia and elsewhere working primarily with young people, it has given special priority to exploring the value of young people’s own perspectives on the issues affecting them. Their informed, detailed accounts confirm the credibility and value of young people as research participants. Together, they and our adult informants have provided nuanced understanding of how nationally recognized social trends and problems are experienced locally. These rich qualitative accounts also allow identification of some cases in which local circumstances deviate from national patterns. At the very least, these local understandings have implications for the delivery and outcomes of SfD activities at community level. Our actor-orientated approach therefore guides us to advocate the importance of the perspectives of local people in providing contextual, localized information to inform SfD research and practice.

The localized data has revealed that the social problems that Zambian SfD organizations address are the products of interrelated and multilevel influences. At local level, the global and national antecedents of poverty discussed in Chapter 2 reduce opportunities for young people, and interact with inequitable social relations to heighten the risk of exposure to HIV. In turn, HIV/AIDS is itself a contributing factor, having wrought fundamental changes in Zambian social and family structures that make young people’s lives precarious. While these changes have affected all Zambians, young people highlight the different and diverse ways in which they and others experience the consequences of HIV/AIDS and other social problems. In doing so, it is noteworthy that many young people express optimism and refer to the support that they draw from family and friends. Some also spoke of positive feelings of attachment towards their communities, despite the many social challenges that they experienced within them. These findings stand in contrast to other studies of Zambian young people (Hansen, 2005; Gough, 2008) which have given less prominence to positive views. It may be that this heightened sense of agency is a consequence of our sample largely consisting of young people involved with SfD activities, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the diverse situations, perspectives and responses young people may offer. That the young people themselves portrayed diversity amongst their peer group would support Coalter’s (2013) criticism of any presentation of young people as universally ‘deficient’. It is in-depth
qualitative data from young people themselves that allows this differentiation to be substantially illuminated.

The agency of young Zambians living in difficult social conditions is necessarily, but to different degrees, constrained. This is evident in the commentaries given about the particularly problematic nature of gender relations within Zambia, which illustrate how constructions of idealized masculine and disempowered feminine youth identities can play a critical role in shaping young people’s responses to risk in sexual encounters. Thus, although the data indicates that at least some young people within Zambia are well educated about HIV/AIDS, it also shows that sound knowledge is not necessarily sufficient to mitigate the effects of broader structural influences. This indicates and reinforces the challenges facing SfD and other organizations that focus on addressing HIV/AIDS in navigating the multilayered influences that shape young people’s behaviour and capacity to engage in safe sexual practice.

The chapter has gone somewhat beyond ‘heartfelt narratives’ of SfD, to reveal local adults and young people as custodians of local expert knowledge. Their informed and considered views allow a localized understanding of the immediate context of SfD that nationally– and internationally–focused analyses conceal. There is also evidence of local desire and efforts to create change in communities, and of challenges and obstacles to achieving this. The implications that aspects of local community contexts have for SfD organizations working within them will be considered further in the following two chapters.