

African Proverb of the Month March, 2005

Mambo? Poa! (Swahili)
How are things? Cool! (English)

Swahili ([Eastern and Central Africa](#)) Saying

Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use

This popular Swahili saying or slang expression of youth in East Africa has many translations. The question *Mambo?* can mean: *How are things? How are you? Hi.* The most common answer is

Poa (Cool!

or I'm cool!) which comes from the verb that means "to get cool or to feel better." Other answers when a person is in a good mood are:

Poa sana (I'm really cool!). Safi (Okay or Fine). Salama (Peaceful)

. Or

Yametulia

that literally means "things are calm/settled." When a person is in a bad mood, he or she can answer: *Ovyo (Bad or Not well).*

Mambo? Poa! is a popular Swahili greeting of general well being that can also include religious overtones. It conveys the positive spirit of African greetings that emphasizes relationships rather than just information or facts.

Biblical Parallels

King Solomon was a young man when he received the kingship from his father King David. During his time he tried to do his level best due to the wisdom that our creator God gave him. "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight" (*Proverbs* 1: 1-2). King Solomon shows us that youth have an important part in society and he says that wisdom is the candle of everything. Our contemporary society must consider the contribution made by youth in bringing social, economic, and political development instead of ignoring them. Much of our workforce comes

from youth. There is a Swahili saying:

Vijana ni nguvukazi ya taifa

(Swahili).

Youth are the labor force of the nation

(English). An example is how youth can contribute something important such as the development of language by adding new vocabulary words and expressions.

A parallel to the greeting *Mambo* is *Amani Kwenu* (*Peace be with you*). This is Jesus' greeting to the apostles in his post resurrection appearances in the *New Testament*

Contemporary Use and Religious Application

President Benjamin William Mkapa of Tanzania and various politicians like to use the word *Mambo* (*How are you?*) before addressing public gatherings. A Youth Office in Dodoma, Tanzania is called the Mambo Poa Youth Centre. It is interesting to note that in Western countries the word "cool" continues to be a very popular response in conversations, especially among young people.

Languages are born, exist and even die due to the availability or absence of users. Jordan Nyenyembe, a lecturer at the St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) in Nyegezi, Mwanza, Tanzania says that society should encourage youth to contribute new words to our vocabulary. These new words and expressions enrich our vocabulary and culture. In linguistic development adolescents are playing a big role by creating new words and expressions that enter into our formal language. Some Swahili words created by youth are *matapeli* (*those who commit fraud*) and *mizengwe* (*problems*)

. These words are now used by politicians and important people in various institutions.

Just think of the growing importance and influence of Sheng (informal language) that is a blend of Swahili, English and other local Kenyan languages (such as Kikuyu, Dholuo, Kamba, etc.). The Sheng word *unbwogable* has now taken on a life of its own in Kenya. Go to the full explanation in the "African Proverb of the Month" for April, 2003:

<http://www.afriprov.org/resources/explain2003.htm#apr03>

African youth should be given a chance to express their feelings and ideas by creating new words and expressions.

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