

UGANDA, GHANA, ZAMBIA & KENYA

Youth-Led Inequality Research



In 2018, a group of 15 committed and talented young researchers from Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya came together to undertake a research project on inequality. The project used a youth-led research methodology, in which young people design research and generate and analyse data through taking the lead on key research activities. The project was based on toolkits developed by ActionAid and Restless Development that identify ways to put the principle of youth participation into practice in research..¹ The aim was to test approaches to strengthen young people's capacity to document, analyse, and research issues in their own contexts, create new knowledge, and use evidence for advocacy.

Building research skills and networks

The young researchers participated in two-week training in Uganda during which they strengthened their research skills, selected the research theme (one aspect of inequality to investigate), and developed the research design. They formed three research sub teams focusing on economic inequality, political inequality and gender inequality. Each team included representatives of different countries. During the two-week period, the researchers carried out a field research in the Apac District in Northern Uganda, using focus group discussion, observations and individual interviews.

After analysing the results, the team prepared an advocacy report and conducted a validation meeting to allow the local community to give feedback on the research findings. Based on this, they developed their calls for action – highlighting the community's proposed solutions and demands for economic, political and gender inequality. Key demands covered measures needed to ensure young people's political participation, policies and programs to create decent employment and economic opportunities for young people (such as more transparent

¹ The methodology was based on the youth-led research methodology of Restless Development (restlessdevelopment.org/our-youth-led-research-methodology) and ActionAid's Youth Programming Toolkit (<https://actionaid.org/publications/2015/actionaids-approach-youth-programming-fundamental-force-development>).

recruitment processes), and policies and programs to promote gender equality (such as women's land ownership).

Sharing learning and conducting advocacy

The young researchers used what they had learned to share knowledge with other young people and used research findings for advocacy at local levels. They conducted step down training with other young people and continued conducting research in their communities in Ghana, Kenya, Zambia and Uganda.

Ugandan young researchers used the research methods and findings to promote transparency and accountability and expose corruption in public institutions. Ugandan participants, working with Activista members, used interview techniques to conduct monitoring visits to fourteen government institutions and programmes (schools, hospitals, health centres) in the Kapchorwa and Kween districts and report corruption cases to the relevant authorities. The reports by young people triggered further investigation on the cases which led to the interdiction of three government employees in Kapchorwa in the Eastern Region². Young researchers from Uganda also advocated on gender equality by speaking on radio about inequality, petitioning against harmful traditional practices, and engaging with traditional leaders in their community on distribution of land and resources. While existing traditional leaders still do not accept that women should own land, about 75% of those aspiring to become cultural leaders believe that this norm should be changed and included gender equality as a top priority in their agendas.

Ghanaian young researchers trained five more young people in Ghana and conducted research on economic and gender inequality experienced by young people in Northern Region and in the capital of Ghana, Accra. Based on four focus groups with 24 young people and two interviews, the research findings showed – in a small sample – some different youth experiences of inequality between the urban and rural communities. The team is now planning to present the research findings and recommendations to the local National Youth Authority to push for revised labour policies and programs.

Zambian young researchers trained four more young people and conducted research on political and economic inequalities young people face in Lusaka. One of the participants works with young social movement Youth4Parliament and plans to use the research skills developed to support their work influencing political party manifestos in the leadup to Zambia's 2021 elections.

Kenyan young researchers trained ten Activista members in Nairobi and conducted research on political inequality. They engaged about 70 people through focus groups and interviews and gathered young people's experiences in representation in elective bodies and explored solutions to increase youth representation in elective positions. The research findings were used to advocate for youth participation in politics on social media, and for campaign planning.

Lessons Learned

Each of the research examples given is very small scale. However, even with these examples we can see the additional transformative impact of research being people-led rather than led by academic researchers. Enabling young people to develop the skills and tools to design and lead their own research projects strengthens their understanding of the issues in their context and inspires them to develop research initiatives that are fully youth-owned and reflect the concerns most important to young people's lives. This in turn allows young people to develop the evidence base they need to take action and fuel effective lobbying and advocacy for the rights and entitlements of young people.

² <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Kapchorwa-Hospital-manager-interdicted/688334-5008114-nvi5qiz/index.html>