From 2013-2016 Y Care International and Liberia and Togo YMCAs supported young slum dwellers to transform their communities. Young people accessed new economic opportunities, took up leadership roles and communities received new water and sanitation facilities and accessed vital health information.
The communities
We targeted four slum communities in the two capital cities: West Point and Slipway in Monrovia, Liberia and Gbenyedji and Katanga in Lomé, Togo. These communities face many environmental risks and health hazards and don’t have secure land tenure to prevent eviction. 53 per cent of the young people we worked with are orphans and few are able to access safe and steady work.

Increasing economic resilience
We supported 172 young women and men with 12 months of vocational and business skills in hairdressing, sewing, catering and auto-mechanics. 87 per cent reported that the training had a positive impact on their ability to access new job and business opportunities.

56 per cent of those trained have already set up a business or found employment and only six per cent are still struggling to cover their basic needs. 73 per cent of trainees are now saving a small amount of their income each month. These resources can be invested into future training or business opportunities or help young people respond to shocks, such as when illness means they cannot work.

Increasing assets
We worked with Shack/Slum Dwellers International to support communities develop their own resources and set up 45 savings clubs which would generate funds for community projects. 2,332 community members joined these clubs and are contributing each month. Additionally, 43 slum dwellers took part in international exchange visits which gave them the chance to learn about how other slum communities worked and addressed development problems.

Improving health and hygiene
We found that few people in our target communities had access to proper healthcare or basic health structures, such as proper water and sanitation points. In Liberia, 50 latrines served a population of just under 75,000 community members.

To help address the limited water and sanitation points, we provided three water pumps and three sets of toilet blocks. 69 per cent of the nearby residents are now using these services on a daily basis. The latrine blocks are used over 5,000 times a week and the water points are providing clean water to over 6,000 people.

Over 8,000 community members benefitted from health and hygiene messages delivered by 30 peer educators. Potentially lifesaving health and hygiene messages were also shared by young people during the 2013 cholera outbreak in Togo and the Ebola crisis in Liberia in 2014.

In total, 15,000 benefitted from our health work and behaviours are changing so that acts, such as open defecation, which can impact upon health are reducing.

Ebola outbreak
The outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in 2014 heavily affected Liberia and the two slum communities of Slipway and Westpoint. Our emergency work supported 45,000 Liberians with hygiene information, access to clean water, and cash for work schemes for young people. 98 per cent of the slum communities reported that the YMCA response was good and 91 per cent of community members were able to identify the causes and symptoms of Ebola after our peer education sessions.

Decision making
Before the project, only 38 per cent of young slum dwellers felt that they were able to influence decision making. They were considered too young or inexperienced. We engaged 214 young slum dwellers with local organisations and supported 50 youth advocates to lobby and work with decision makers to create change.

Young people are now official members of local committees and organisations; in Liberia, youth were invited to participate in National Urban Policy development and in Togo, young people took part in discussions on resettlement of the Gbenyedji community. 74 per cent of young people now feel that they can influence decision making and 69 per cent are engaged in decision making processes on a regular basis.
Y Care International is continuing its work in slum communities with the YMCAs of Liberia and Togo to ensure that the benefits of this work are scaled up and reach more people.

We will work more with the YMCAs and Shack/Slum Dweller International to develop community savings groups. These groups are pivotal for communities to build up their own resources and define how they will invest and develop their local area. It firmly places decision making for community development into the hands of those who it will most affect: the community members.

We want to continue providing a platform for young slum dwellers’ voices. In October 2016, we supported three young slum dwellers from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zambia to attend Habitat III hosted by the United Nations in Quito, Ecuador to discuss urban development. The young leaders worked with 562 peers to bring their views and opinions to decision makers gathering for the conference. We want to ensure that young leaders continue to have a voice and presence in slum development and we are now preparing their attendance to the World Urban Forum in February 2018.

We will work with our partners to share our knowledge and learning on what works for young slum dwellers across our youth networks and apply this to our new and existing work. We want to invest more time and resources for exchanges of young slum dwellers to create regional and international knowledge sharing hubs for slum development.

Young women and men will remain at the heart of all the work we do. This will be reflected in how young people will engage with our programmes; from guaranteeing young people an active role in defining and implementing our projects to supporting them with basic needs, such as food and transportation, to remove potential barriers to their involvement with our work.

**What changed?**

**Our project in numbers**

- **24,052** YOUNG PEOPLE REACHED
- **94%** receiving livelihoods skills are now able to cover their basic needs
- **2,342** joined community savings groups
- **74%** are confident they can influence decision making
- **90%** reported the project had a positive impact on their lives
- **73%** now understand their civic duties

**What next?**

Y Care International is continuing its work in slum communities with the YMCAs of Liberia and Togo to ensure that the benefits of this work are scaled up and reach more people.

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Stories of change

“The YMCA has made me feel like a millionaire. Before, I had no skills or income but now I can provide for my family and I am respected. Am I not a millionaire?”

Joseph, 23, West Point, Liberia

“The government has never helped the people of Katanga, all they do is evict us. The YMCA has helped us to organise ourselves so that we can develop our own community.”

Victoire, Katanga, Togo

“Young people here have the energy to make things happen. Development in the community will be rapid now.”

Community leader, Slipway, Liberia

“Before I met the YMCA I was hopeful I could do something worthwhile but I had no confidence. I was always begging others to help me. Now I have my video game and cafe business, it is a not big business yet but I am appreciated and my community cites me as an example for other young people who are not working. I have my challenges to overcome but I’m running my life and I’m a role model. I am very grateful to the YMCA who have made it possible for me to be where I am today.”

Jean, 27, Gbényédzi

Project dashboard: Act2Live

Goal
Improve the living conditions of slum dwellers in Monrovia, Liberia and Lomé, Togo

Implementing partners: YMCAs of Liberia and Togo

Funders: Comic Relief

Duration: January 2013 to April 2016

Cost: £687,459

Publications

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Y Care International creates opportunities for vulnerable young people across the globe to change their lives for the better. Inspired by and faithful to our Christian values, we work with people of all faiths and none to build a more just world, free from poverty.