

## Securing justice for young detainees in Togo

Since 2004, Y Care International and the Young Men's Christian Association of Togo have worked to protect and promote the rights of young people in conflict with the law.

From 2013 to 2016, we focused on reducing human rights violations and improving access to fair trials for young detainees in four locations.

# The results

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## Developing Young Leaders

We supported 100 young women and men, inside and outside prisons, to be catalysts for change through Advocacy Groups and Legal Clubs. 50 young people were trained in leadership skills, advocacy approaches and lobbying and negotiation to increase their influence with key judiciary stakeholders.

47 male detainees and 3 female detainees worked as in-prison Legal Club members. These innovative detainee-led clubs pioneered by Togo YMCA and Y Care International inform other inmates on their legal rights and provide much-needed para-legal support.

## Changing the Judicial Environment

The YMCA together with the Advocacy Groups, Legal Clubs and 5 Togolese human rights organisations developed relationships with the Department of Justice, judges and prosecutors. They raised priority concerns of detainees and lobbied key decision-makers for improvements to judicial procedures and conditions of detention. These interventions led to judges in Kara doubling the number of court hearings each month. In Sokodé, young advocates secured materials and supplies to enable detainees to generate income by making handicrafts.

The Legal Clubs' engagement with local judges led to an increase in the number of hearings held in remote locations. These hearings allowed 521 people to be tried and 48 detainees were subsequently released. The Deputy Minister of Justice recognised and thanked the YMCA for their role in supporting Legal Clubs who significantly contribute to reducing the length of detention for many detainees.

## Improving Treatment of Detainees

In 2013, 90 per cent of detainees reported that they had been poorly treated by prison staff. They described being humiliated, physically abused and intimidated.

We worked with 253 penal chain representatives, including police officers, prison guards and supervisors, to increase knowledge on human rights and share best practice in working with people in conflict with the law.

Transparency and accountability towards detainees from penal chain representatives has dramatically

increased in targeted prisons, which is contributing to improved treatment as reported by detainees.

## Improving Detention Conditions

Less than 0.7 per cent of Togo's national budget is spent on justice each year. With only 32p allocated per detainee per day, the conditions in prisons in Togo are inhumane.

We have been working to address this situation in a number of ways. Members of Legal Clubs have been monitoring and reporting on the specific conditions and cases of abuse in places of detention. The YMCA, youth Advocacy Groups and partner human rights organisations have used this information to lobby over 100 key decision-makers, including representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Security. These interactions have led to tangible changes in places of detention. More resources have been allocated for healthcare in detention which has increased access to sanitation by 5 per cent. In Kara, a health committee was created which has improved washing facilities in the prison and provided over 50 sleeping mats to detainees.

## Accessing Legal Support

In 2013, only 7 per cent of detainees had access to a lawyer and trust in the justice system was low. Detainees commonly had little knowledge on the nature of their charge, their legal rights or legal proceedings.

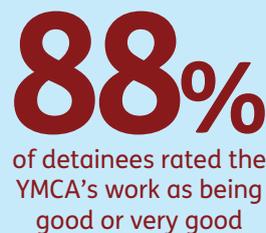
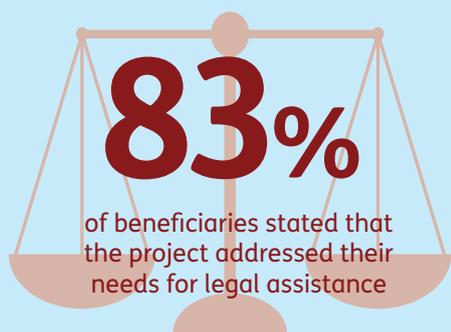
Each year the Legal Clubs provided accessible information on legal rights and responsibilities to over 15,000 detainees. 50 per cent of detainees stated that the project helped to increase their knowledge in this area.

**The Legal Clubs have been pivotal in giving a voice to detainees, especially those whose cases had been lost or forgotten in the judicial system. They have reduced delays in legal proceedings and worked tirelessly with judges, magistrates and prosecutors to ensure that detainees receive a fair trial.**

The Legal Clubs have written 17,258 legal request letters on behalf of fellow detainees; 8,032 detainees received a hearing as a result and 1,740 detainees were released. 27 per cent of detainees now trust the judicial system and 76 per cent have had their case heard by a judge.

## What changed?

## Our project in numbers



## What next?

Y Care International and Togo YMCA remain committed to improving access to justice for young women and men in Togo. We will continue to support Advocacy Clubs to influence decision makers and bring lasting change to the judicial system. The YMCA will also keep working with the Ministries of Justice and Security to influence legislation and budgeting, and increase accountability.

Legal Clubs have been a hugely successful innovation within the Togolese justice system. We will continue to support Clubs to build their capacity and independence. The Ministries of Justice and Security will be lobbied to replicate these clubs across every prison in the country, with technical support from Togo YMCA.

Ignorance of crimes and related punishments are key contributing factors to young people coming into conflict with the law. We will continue our awareness campaigns and peer education in places of detention and in communities to

increase young people's knowledge on their rights and responsibilities.

Poverty and deprivation are root causes of youth offending and re-offending in Togo. Most offences committed by young people are economically-motivated. We are providing technical skills and assets to young people at risk or those already in conflict with the law to access employment and enterprise opportunities. Securing decent work is key to reducing the risk of coming into conflict with the law in the first instance, and to supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of former detainees.

We believe a safer, more supportive family and community environment will reduce the risk of offending or reoffending. Many parents and communities do not have the skills to nurture young people's development and young people often face discrimination. We will raise awareness with communities on the needs of young women and men and build the capacity of families to better support their young family members.

## Stories of change

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“ Before the advocacy training I was shy and didn't have the confidence or skills to try and influence anyone, especially an authority figure. Now, however, I am knowledgeable about the justice system and detainees' rights. I am working with the prison authorities and judiciary to ensure young people can access justice. I would never have had the courage to do this without the skills and confidence I gained through the training. ”

**Edith, 26, Female, Kara**

“ Being part of the Legal Club has been my greatest achievement so far. The knowledge I gained on my rights and duties will stop me from making mistakes in the future. Now I am released I want to use this

knowledge to stop my friends and family from choosing paths that will likely lead to prison. ”

**Yao, 26, Male, Lomé**

“ I was amazed by the activities of the Legal Club. They worked tirelessly to help me with my case, which really sped up the judicial process. Thanks to their work and efforts I obtained freedom. I hope that these activities can continue to improve detainees' knowledge regarding their rights during the judicial process. ”

**Didier, 47, Male, Sokodé**

## Project dashboard: Securing justice for young detainees in Togo

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### Goal

Increase access to justice for 2,500 detainees, reduce human rights' violations amongst 7,500 detainees and build the capacity of human rights defenders in Togo

### Implementing

**partners:** Young Men's Christian Association of Togo

**Funders:** European Commission  
Forest YMCA  
Comic Relief

**Duration:** November 2013–October 2016

**Cost:** €550,816



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