**YOUTH-LED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**What do we mean when we say “youth-led research?”**

At Restless Development, we are committed to facilitating young people to conduct research on the issues that matter to them.

We do not stop at assisting them in drawing out meaningful and relevant findings. We also support them to share those findings to inform needs-responsive programme design and to advocate for evidence-based solutions for policy formulation and resource allocation.

We do so through our youth-led research methodology, which we have delivered across the geographic contexts we work in to understand key contextual dimensions of the goal areas young people identified for themselves: having a voice, a living, sexual rights, and leadership.

Across these various locations and issues, our methodology remains consistent. Grounded in reflection of the best practices we have identified through this experience, this methodology is our standardised 6-step approach to supporting young people to lead the research process from end-to-end at every stage.

**But why youth-led?**

Our commitment to youth-led research goes beyond our Restless Values of putting youth at the forefront of development.

We find that much of professional and academic research provides rich and rigorous insight into youth issues but can miss key dimensions in how young people experience—and respond to—these contexts. We find that this gap in understanding comes when young people are not meaningfully engaged in the process of investigating the issues that affect them.

At Restless Development, we do things differently. Our peer-to-peer approach empowers young people to drive the inquiry process, where they are uniquely able to capture the perspectives of young people like themselves.

We believe that young people can—and should—provide vital voices and evidence-based recommendations in ongoing discussions on youth-issues.

**How does it work?**

Our 6-step youth-led research methodology is comprised of the following steps:

1. **Setting the framework**
2. **Designing the questions**
3. **Collecting the data**
4. **Analysing the findings**
5. **Conducting validation exercises**
6. **Sharing to catalyze discussion and action**

What makes this methodology unique is that each step has a clearly defined role for both staff and young researchers designed to maximize young people’s leadership, supported by the technical expertise of staff.
1. Setting the Framework

**Staff Role:** This is the only part of methodology where staff take the first step. Because all of our research has a practical application, staff determine the research focus in order to guide the researchers to gather findings that speak to how the research will be used.

**Young Researcher Role:** Researchers provide feedback on the research framework, ensuring that it reflects their priorities and that no critical dimension is missing.

2. Designing the Questions

**Young Researcher Role:** Based on the research priorities, researchers are facilitated to design the study. They then determine the research questions—both the key, overarching research questions and the detailed research questions included in the data collection instruments.

**Staff Role:** Staff provide capacity-building on how best to formulate research questions and questionnaires. They provide technical oversight on surveys and interview guides to ensure that all are to best practice.

3. Collecting the Data

**Young Researcher Role:** After receiving training in best field practices, researchers collect all data directly from respondents that they identify in the field, administering all surveys and conducting all interviews and focus group discussions.

**Staff Role:** Staff provide support supervision—remote or in-person, depending on the geographic scope of the study area. They lend their expertise in troubleshooting any challenges the researchers face.

4. Analyzing the Findings

**Young Researcher Role:** Following analytical training delivered by staff, researchers lead the analysis of the data that they have gathered. They identify the key themes and patterns in the data and compile them into a first draft of the report.

**Staff Role:** From their expertise, staff determine a clear, rigorous analytical methodology that researchers use. After researchers have finalized their analysis, staff feed in their technical oversight, polishing the analysis together with the researchers.

5. Conducting Validation Exercises

**Young Researcher Role:** Researchers present findings at the community-level to those who participated in the study. Through these discussions, community members have an opportunity to hear and comment on emerging findings, critiquing whether it accurately reflects their perspectives and provide any clarifications they might have.

**Staff Role:** Staff guide researchers in identifying outstanding questions to return to when speaking with community members. As validation is ongoing, they provide support supervision.
6. Sharing to Catalyze Discussion and Action

Young Researcher Role: Researchers lead sessions to discuss the research findings, co-designing the discussion guide that will help translate the findings into action together with those present.

Staff Role: Staff provide the researchers with guidance on how best to package and present the findings. They also support researchers in facilitating these sessions. Staff also play a critical role in strengthening existing spaces where young people can interact with decision-makers and creating them where they do not yet exist.

Our Methodology in Action:

Youth Think Tank
One of the ways that we have put our youth-led research methodology into action is through our Youth Think Tank programme. Based out of our Uganda hub and in partnership with Mastercard Foundation, this programme brings together young researchers from 7 countries: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, and Ghana.

Our most recent cohort of 28 young researchers applied our youth-led research methodology to explore the challenges and opportunities young people like themselves are facing in: i) developing and using agricultural technologies and ii) securing, retaining, and being promoted employment in hospitality and tourism. We will be launching the findings of their research on agricultural technologies in Ghana in January 2018.

The 14 researchers who focused on this topic drove every stage of the research process:

Together with Mastercard Foundation, our programme team helped set the framework for inquiry into young people’s experience with agricultural technologies. Through a 2-week Foundation Training in Entebbe (Uganda), the young researchers determined that they wanted to focus on the challenges young people face in innovating and adopting agricultural technologies, as well as the opportunities and solutions that they found around these challenges.

As part of their Foundation Training, the young researchers designed the data collection instruments—focus group discussion guides capturing the experience of young people at each stage of the agrifood system; semi-structured interview guides for agri-technology innovators and adopters,, and a survey tool. Training sessions delivered by our staff led them in this process and acquainted them with the best practices in field-based data collection.

Young researchers then returned to their home countries to collect data in the field, identifying all respondents (according to protocol) and organising all logistics. Throughout this stage, staff provided support and supervision to help them troubleshoot any challenges or barriers they faced.
After collecting all of the data, the young researchers came together for a 10-day Analysis Workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to analyse the data they had gathered. The programme team provided technical training in thematic analysis to guide researchers through practically analysing the data themselves. They developed, workshoped, and peer-reviewed theme maps of the emerging top-line findings, demonstrating how these themes connected to each other to say something meaningful in the sector. Staff then polished the analysis following this workshop, building in the quantitative elements and linking together the country-level findings.

After aggregating the findings, staff identified outstanding questions that required further information. Researchers then took the findings back to the communities that they collected data in and used this touch-point to collect more information on critical nuances of findings that were not immediately clear from the first round of data collection.

Stay tuned for more information about our upcoming launch of our findings in Ghana!

The Big Idea

Funded by UNICEF, The Big Idea was a youth-led research programme implemented by Restless Uganda in Northern Uganda and the Karamoja Region. The aim of the research was to collect data that young people could use to initiate meaningful dialogue with decision-makers around accountability asks.

Staff consulted U-Report data from programme districts in order to inform the accountability issues that young people in those districts were speaking about most—health and education.

Staff trained 40 young researchers—10 per district—on technical skills for both research and advocacy to provide them with the capacity base to lead the programme. During this one-week intensive training, young researchers identified key issues in health and education service delivery in their communities. Staff facilitated this process by leading researchers through a community mapping exercise. Young researchers then triangulated emerging issues with the perspectives of district leaders to ensure their buy-in in the process. After identifying key issues, young researchers developed the questions that they would ask to collect evidence on public service delivery in their district.

Young researchers identified respondents—peers, local government leaders, service providers, CSOs, private sector actors, and religious leaders—under the guidance of staff. Researchers collected data through teamwork in pairs
filling different roles—lead interviewer and note taker—according to their strengths. Staff provided guidance in this process through direct field mentorship and remote support supervision.

After collecting the data, staff gathered young researchers back for a 1-week analysis workshop. Staff provided thematic analysis training, which researchers practically applied manually gathering and organising data into themes. Staff supported young researchers to develop “advocacy asks”—specific actions decision-makers should take to address the identified challenges—based on the on-ground evidence they had collected.

Before taking these advocacy asks to decision-makers, young researchers presented them to the target communities they represented to ensure that the evidence on which they were based reflected these community members’ lived experience.

Staff coached young researchers in a 2-day session to prepare them for how best to facilitate dialogue with district leaders. Young researchers presented their findings to district officials, highlighting their advocacy asks and requesting commitments. They then shared commitments back to community members so that they could also get involved with holding their leaders accountable. Young researchers then ensured these commitments were taken forward by tracking them and documenting progress made.