

RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT

40
YEARS

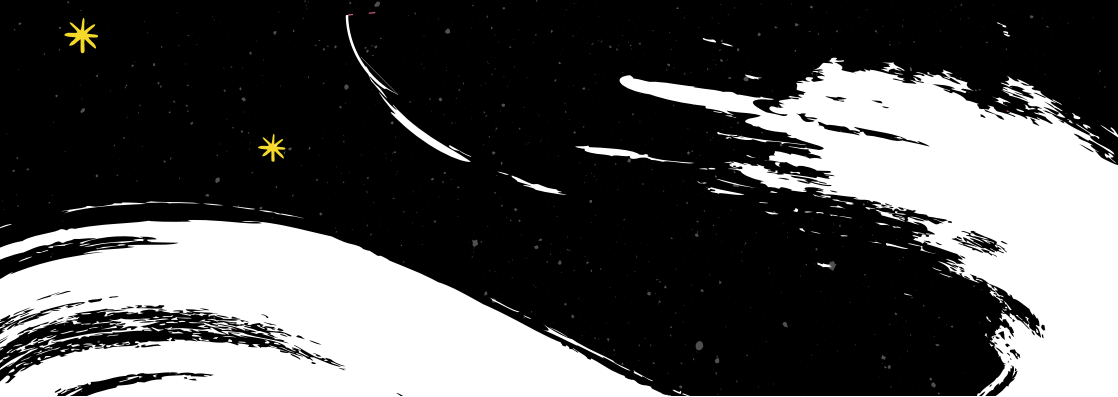
THE STORY OF RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

40 years of transformation

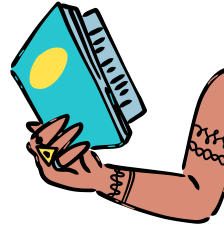
Over the past four decades, Restless Development has gone through a journey of transformation – changing its structure, name and approach.

However, at its core the mission has remained the same: support young people to lead change and address the world's biggest challenges.

What started out as a UK-based charity which provided gap years for the privileged few is unrecognisable today. Audacious and fuelled by relentless optimism, Restless Development is now a locally led global network which has impacted more than 10 million young leaders around the world.



The 80's & 90's: The Maverick Youth Organisation



In 1985, Jim Cogan – a deputy headteacher in London who believed in young people’s potential to learn by leading and teaching others – embarked on the journey of what is Restless Development today.

Each year, school leavers travelled to Zimbabwe to teach English, Maths, and Science in under-resourced schools. The initiative first registered as Third World Projects, and soon renamed Schools Partnership Worldwide (SPW).

In the 1990s, SPW transitioned from classroom teaching to a peer education model. Volunteers focused on sexual health, life skills, and environmental education – particularly in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic – working in partnership with national governments across Southern Africa.

Gradually, the focus shifted toward supporting national volunteers, moving beyond the traditional “gap year” model to empower young people to lead development within their own communities.

Over the following decade, the organisation expanded to Tanzania, India, Nepal, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, the United States, and Sierra Leone. SPW established offices rooted in local communities rather than capital cities, and during this period was renamed Students Partnership Worldwide.

The Naughties: A New Era of Youth Led-Development

With the turn of the century – and the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals – SPW set out to establish itself as a credible leader in youth-led development.

Organisational strategy and structure became a priority. SPW began systematically evaluating the impact of its volunteer programmes and co-designing initiatives with young people, recognising the interconnection between health, livelihoods, and opportunity. As results strengthened, institutional funding followed, and the concept of youth leadership gained traction across the international development sector.

At age 28, a new CEO succeeded the organisation's founder and soon launched SPW's first global strategy, positioning young people at the forefront of social and economic change.

New systems were introduced to strengthen transparency and equity, including a global salary framework to ensure consistency across all roles – from driver to CEO – in an expanding international team.

This period also marked a significant rebrand: SPW became Restless Development, a name that captured both the energy of youth and the organisation's commitment to tangible development impact.



The 2010s: Transparency and Collective Leadership



A global consultation of young leaders, volunteers, and staff led to the creation of new organisational values – Heart, Head, Hands, and Voice. Building on this, a new global strategy aimed to unleash youth-led change beyond existing borders.

Restless Development secured its first strategic grant from UK Aid, demonstrating that youth-led change could be both impactful and cost-effective. This milestone transformed the organisation, enabling a more sustainable business model and embedding a culture of “radical accountability”.

Investment focused on strengthening regional Hubs in Africa and Asia, diversifying income streams, and launching innovative fundraising initiatives such as the UK Schools Triathlons.

As UK government investment in youth leadership grew, Restless Development restarted international volunteering through the International Citizen Service (ICS), where it played a central role to connect national volunteers and a global network of active citizens. The organisation played a key role in global youth consultations informing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and launched two enduring initiatives – the Youth Think Tank and the Youth Collective.

Leadership evolved from a UK-led structure to a globally distributed governance model, ensuring diversity and meaningful youth participation in decision-making at every level.

The 2020s: Locally Led, Globally Connected



Restless Development continues its journey to shift power – focusing on directing resources and decision-making to young leaders, while intentionally addressing historic power imbalances in all areas of its work.

National Hubs are now locally governed, led by national boards and teams – many of whom began as young volunteers. These leaders also participate in the Global Leadership Group, which defines global strategy and ensures the network collectively prioritises youth leadership, fundraising, quality assurance, and coordination.

Restless Development's Co-CEOs embody a feminist leadership model that intentionally redistributes power, embeds wellbeing goals for all staff, celebrates diversity, prioritises safeguarding, and fosters a culture where every young leader can thrive.

With over 90% of staff based in the Global South, Restless Development operates as a locally led, globally connected network – committed to transforming power dynamics across governance, funding, and operations.

SHIFTING
YOUTH POWER

Strengthening Youth Civil Society

Restless Development works to strengthen the ecosystem that supports youth civil society. From hosting networks and movements such as Youth Stop AIDS, Democracy Moves, and Ending Violence Against Children, to running Youth Power Hacks, building Communities of Action, and collaborating with National Working Groups across all our Hubs, we have helped ensure that young people and youth organisations can thrive everywhere.

The Youth Collective is a global network for any youth group or network to join, connect and access resources. The Youth Collective now has 5,705 members. It has:

- Re-granted £6,750,000 to 295 youth organisations and young leaders
- Established 8 national and 6 thematic chapters including an Enterprise chapter, a Democracy chapter and a Sexual Health chapter
- Hosted 11 leadership labs with over 1,100 people
- Supported 6 Global State of Youth Civil Society reports



The Next 40 Years

Our vision is a world where young people are able to lead change on the world's greatest challenges. Where they have the investment, opportunities, networks and ecosystem to convene and lead.

- Half of the world's rapidly growing population is under 30.
- The world has changed at pace – technology, climate change, and shifting global connections are transforming how we live, work, and lead.
- With challenges and opportunities at an unprecedented level – Restless Development continues to ensure young people are at the forefront of change.

When youth civil society is thriving, we can shut our doors.

As a locally led global network, we exist to strengthen youth-led change. We shift power and resources to young leaders and youth organisations. Incubating youth-led campaigns, and organisations. Connecting and catalysing youth-led change at every level and strengthening the global ecosystem to ensure young leaders and youth-led organisations are equipped to shape a just and sustainable future for all.



Our Theory of Change

A visualisation of what we do, how we do it and the impact of our work.



**Restless Development
supercharges youth-led
change for a better world.**

Youth-Led Flexible Funding

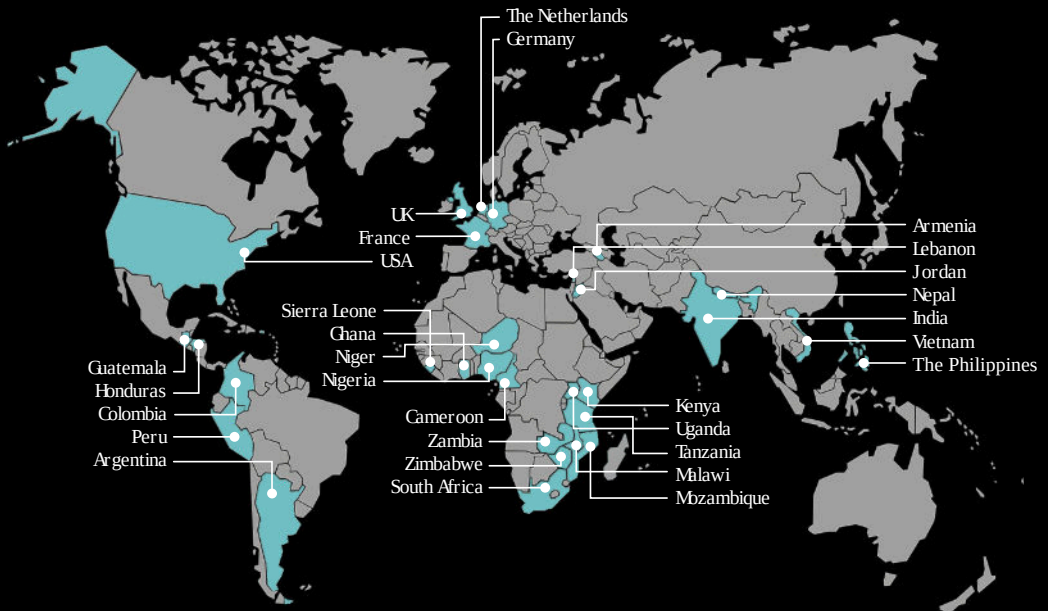
Our State of Youth Civil Society has consistently told us that the biggest risk is a lack of resources – especially youth-led flexible funding. We've used this to advocate for youth funds, and flow money directly to young people.

£2.5 million

re-distributed to young changemakers since the inception of the Youth Collective. Youth-led funds have been hosted in Sierra Leone, India, across Africa and the UK.

These youth funds have led to positive change in hundreds of communities – from creating solar-power backpacks for underprivileged students in rural areas of Sierra Leone, rejuvenating a well in India to provide safe drinking water to 400 households, to supporting the Ullapool Sea Savers, a group run entirely by young people aged 7 to 17, based in the remote North-West Highlands of Scotland, who are protecting their local marine environment.

Where We Work



Improving Gender and Sexual Rights

With the support of Restless Development, young people have led efforts to end AIDS by raising awareness and reducing stigma in Eastern and Southern Africa, thus slowing its spread. We have campaigned for the UK government to make record contributions to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and championed for the creation of the Medicine Patent Pool to deliver HIV drugs to the millions who need them.

In Zambia, the Kudziwa Ishiwi programme trained 50 young leaders who in turn supported 8,880 young people to lead community dialogues with their local health authorities and the Ministry of Health, improving local health systems to provide sexual and reproductive health services to young people.

In Uganda, work with 10 to 24-year-olds on the Get Up, Speak Out programme increased knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights from 42% to 96% and increased the uptake of contraceptives, HIV counselling, and testing by 26%.

20,000 people

in the community serviced through a new maternity ward, police station, and toilet block were constructed in Zambia



96%

of 10–24 year olds in Uganda showed increased knowledge on sexual health and rights

In Nepal, young people led efforts to end Chhaupadi – a harmful practice that forces women and girls to stay away from their homes during menstruation. By working with 14,461 community leaders to raise awareness, we reduced the number of women who reported having limited access to nutritious food during their periods from 95% to 10.7%. We worked with men and boys to change behaviours and attitudes across communities.

In Sierra Leone, 94% of adolescent girls engaged in Restless Development school clubs reported an increase in self-respect and confidence, with 91% confident to delay marriage until the age of 18 – and only if they want to. Across all Hubs, young men and boys have been engaged to raise awareness and enable positive masculinities.




Multiplying Youth Livelihoods

Restless Development has supported youth in Tanzania, Uganda and Sierra Leone to develop entrepreneurship and business skills, start businesses and successfully utilised its peer education model to train young people, especially those from marginalized communities, in financial literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Our financial literacy and inclusion training has had a huge impact on young people. In Sierra Leone, women living in informal settlements have come together to form savings groups, opened bank accounts, and have been able to access soft loans at flexible interest rates.

By training 148 young people to deliver basic finance skills such as numeracy and bookkeeping, we reached over 20,000 women, leading to the creation of 237 savings groups, and 70% of participants opening an active bank account.

92%

of young mothers in Tanzania were  able to financially support themselves and their families.

20,000

women in Sierra Leone benefitted from financial literacy training.

In Zambia, couples savings groups have not only led to an increase in household income, but also an improvement in collaborative decision making. In Tanzania, adolescent girls and young mothers were trained in life skills and entrepreneurship, which – as well as improving financial knowledge – resulted in a marked increase in the uptake of HIV counseling, testing and family planning.

In Zimbabwe, the Burutu Youth Group completed their entrepreneurship training and started a small broiler poultry project steadily increasing production through collaboration and consistent effort. To promote sustainability, the members established a savings scheme where they each contributed US \$10 monthly, leading to a total of US \$360 so far. With persistence and adaptability, they now plan to expand into horticulture to diversify their income and strengthen their livelihoods.



Catalysing Community-Led Responses

Restless Development's flagship work has been to create and strengthen community-led efforts for development and humanitarian response.

In 2014–2015, young people and community members in Sierra Leone used participatory approaches to help stop the spread of Ebola. By creating action plans aligned with local by-laws and securing the commitment of village headmen and chiefs, they helped prevent transmission and promote safe burial practices - bringing infection rates down to zero.

In 2015, Restless Development supported community-led responses to the earthquake, working with local youth to aid in the recovery process. Acting within the first 72 hours, young volunteers helped to provide water, food and shelter and went on to establish child friendly spaces where young people couldn't attend school.

55%

mentioned house visits by community mobilisers as an important source of information about Ebola.

10,000

* communities were supported to develop and implement action plans to end Ebola.

Restless Development has facilitated and enabled consultations and accountability across the world on many development priorities. We convened the youth consultations for the Sustainable Development Goals - with input from 7,000 young people in more than 60 countries. These youth-driven findings were presented to the United Nations, influencing the design of youth-relevant targets.



Protecting the Planet and People

Restless Development supports young people to tackle the most urgent challenges related to climate change in their communities.

In India, we directed over \$134,000 to youth organisations and local young leaders in Bengaluru to design innovative climate resilience and mitigation strategies. They led a campaign encouraging wedding halls to reuse cutlery and reduce plastic waste, and developed games to help young people understand and engage with climate change.

Over the past three years, we have worked with local governments and schools in Nepal to establish 36 government schools as Climate Smart Schools. We developed a curriculum to enhance students' knowledge on the circular economy, plastic pollution, climate change.

Our latest research on green jobs with the University of Cambridge explores the availability, attitudes, and possibilities for green job creation with and for young people.

> \$134,000

was channeled directly to grassroots youth organisations and young leaders in India for climate justice work.



24,835

young people have been reached since 2022 through our work in climate justice.

In Uganda, our Taking Climate Change to Schools project boosted climate education in primary schools in the Jinja and Karamoja regions. Introducing practical teaching tools, we cultivated student interest in climate response – developing and testing a model for the integration of climate education into national primary school curricula across the country.

We connected 250 young people across 30 countries through a series of regional consultations that culminated in a 24-hour Big Idea relay session where young people brainstormed on the challenges and potential solutions on how we can influence decision makers to take action on climate change.



**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**

**40
YEARS**



40 YEARS OF YOUTH-LED CHANGE

Since we began:

We've nurtured

250,000

young people with youth leadership opportunities – given the support, training and investment to lead

In 2024:

99%

of young leaders felt supported to become leaders

We've reached

10,000,000

young people through our programmes

98%

of young leaders felt proud to partner with Restless Development

Restless Development alumni include political leaders in every hub country, and an impressive network of business and cultural leaders.

Many credit Restless Development with their success. And we credit our success to you! Thank you for being a part of this incredible journey. Here's to the next 10 million young leaders!

Interested in knowing more? Reach out to us at info@restlessdevelopment.org