

# INTRODUCTION

to

## YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT

*Briefing Notes prepared by David Woollcombe, Founder and President of Peace Child International and*

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**BACKGROUND:** In 2002, at the Rio+10 Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Youth Caucus coined a slogan:

“SEE YOUTH AS A RESOURCE – NOT A PROBLEM!”

Writing in his introduction to David Woollcombe’s book, *Youth-led Development*, UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, quotes this slogan and writes: “How right they are. Young people are the most precious resource our planet possesses.”

The phrase, *Youth-led Development*, was first heard at PCI’s Millennium Young People’s Congress in Hawaii in October 1999. A young delegate from Zimbabwe, said: “There need to be more development projects led by the youth....” But the idea of Youth-led development[YLD] was not much discussed at that Congress. Gandhi’s instruction: “You have to Be the Change you want to see in the world...” became the brand that the young delegates attached themselves to – and promoted. Yet Being the Change and YLD are essentially the same thing: in both cases, young people are recognizing that there’s no point in waiting around for governments or some external agency to make the changes they need in their lives. They have to make those changes themselves.

**PEACE CHILD INTERNATIONAL:** It is entirely appropriate that David Woollcombe and Peace Child International adopted and promoted the term: *Youth-led Development*. PCI drew its Mission Statement, “Empowering Young People” from the experience David had driving the teen-age actors home from early rehearsals of the *Peace Child* musical. They were discussing the content of the story in the back of his car – and he realized that the conversations they were having, and the jokes they were telling each other, were more interesting than the text he’d written for them in the play. So he re-wrote the text and gave it to them at rehearsals next day.

“Hey!” they said, “That’s what I said in the car last night...”

“I know,” said David, “I thought it was great – and now you’re going to say it in front of 3,000 people in the Royal Albert Hall...”

And that made them feel good about themselves.

It made them feel that their ideas mattered.

It empowered them.

Since then, every book that PCI has published, every project it’s done, every Congress it’s organized, has been devised, managed and implemented by young people. With guidance from experienced adults, like David. The partnership between elders and youngers is key. It gives you the best of both worlds – but, in PCI, the ownership always lies with the youth.

David writes: “I believe that our world would benefit immensely from a more muscular inclusion of young people in our decision-making process and in the execution of those decisions. Youth-led development(YLD) is born in the faith that young people can contribute constructively to the good of society in the years before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays. I have spent my adult life operationalizing that faith - devolving insane amounts of responsibility on to young shoulders in every Peace Child project I’ve ever done. Very, very rarely have they let me down.”

**EXAMPLES OF YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT:** The term, *Youth-led Development*, quickly became mainstream. Within a couple of years, it was turning up in World Bank and UN Briefing Papers.

When PCI organized its 4<sup>th</sup> World Youth Congress in Canada, officials at the official Canadian Development Agency couldn't believe that it was PCI that coined the term. They called their Congress, "[A Celebration of Youth-Led Development](#)." And it was! Within 10 short years, YLD had gone from nowhere to a full-fledged feature of the International Development landscape – recognized by all as an effective, low-cost and highly practical method of delivering development gains while at the same time offering useful experiential education and work-readiness training to young people.

Perhaps most flattering of all, one of Britain's oldest and most revered youth development agencies, Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW), re-branded itself as: [Restless Development – the Youth-Led Development Agency](#). It won contracts from DFID, and raised millions of dollars to empower youth-led projects around the world, carrying the torch for Youth-led Development into agencies and funding sources that PCI could never reach.

Peace Child International's practical application of the YLD concept started with the MAF – the Millennium Action Fund which supported thousands of small, youth-led action projects in over 100 countries, some of which are catalogued in [the book](#) the young people created for the Canada World Youth Congress. Several young people felt that this scatter-shot approach was diluting the YLD impact, so sought to consolidate. The result was the idea of a Be the Change Academy, a concept born in the mind of Jagan Devaraj, the young Indian who set up a Peace Child office in Bangalore, India. The BTCA idea was finally realized by a young German-Croatian, Ann-Katrina Bregovic, who set up the first one in the Nyalenda slum in Kisumu, Kenya.



**Be the Change Academy - Kenya**

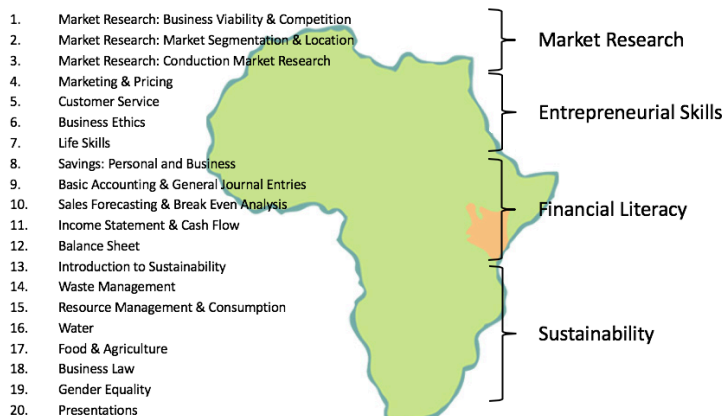
In a very disciplined way, 20-year old Ann-Katrina recruited young women and men, many of whom had been running informal businesses for several years, and took them through the BTCA training. Most of the trainings were (and still are) done in the open, under the symbolic community mango trees.



They covered market research, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy and sustainability – enabling the young people to double and sometimes triple their income through enhancing their management

skills. It also encouraged them to save – something that few of them had ever done, meaning that, as soon as their business hit problems, or they had an accident, their business would fold.

## Training lessons



Current PCI CEO, Adriana Pogli, has – with Fred Fenwick and Rob Giddings, developed the BTCA concept into a locally-led programme for marginalized young women in rural areas of [North-East Sierra Leone](#).

Despite the success of the original training in West Africa, PCI had found that the literacy based elements of the trainings were excluding many of the young women who needed help the most.

To address this, in close collaboration with the local community, local NGOs and illiterate young women themselves, Adriana led the development of training materials that were specifically designed using images and games for young people who couldn't read or write and who had little or no education. In line with her view that all programmes must be sustainable and rooted in the community, Peace Child International works through local NGO's and supports people in country to become trainers and run the programme themselves, ensuring the knowledge and skills are retained within the local community, not with international staff or volunteers. Peace Child is now proud to have more local staff in country than here in the UK head office. Since 2014 over 10,000 young women have now taken part in the training and the image based tools are proving highly effective.



In addition the business trainings, our program also includes linking meetings to introduce the business women to local services (micro finance, trade unions etc) who will be able to support them as their businesses grow and evolve over the years. We also deliver a unique savings group training methodology which recognizes the importance of informal savings groups for women to access vital capital. The training methodology uses colours and symbols to ensure illiterate group members are able to accurately track money in and out, ensuring group leaders can be held to account and improving trust and transparency for everyone.

To ensure we are working in the right communities we have developed a robust targeting strategy to identify the most vulnerable communities. To do this we look at:

- Access to education
- Access to markets and economic opportunities
- Access to basic services such as sanitation
- Access to Gov and NGO supported services

This has been highly successful. Our recent project in Kenema found:

- 87% of the women trained could not read or write and had never been to school.
- Only 9% had completed primary school, and 4% had completed secondary school.
- The communities where we work have not had any previous NGO support, so there is no duplication of efforts.



Following the BTCA trainings, which are all led by local staff in local languages, 86% of the participants being able to determine their income levels after undergoing the training and 77% of them are now earning more than \$50 USD a month compared to just 11% at training start. Statistics from a previous project show that after just 12 months, participants' income will increase on average by \$125 per month. This is a 255% increase on their pre-training income of just \$49 per month – providing for their families in ways that they could never have imagined.



The funding for the BTCA project came originally from NORAD and was focused on marginalized young women as they were the most in need of support and training. According to UNESCO and the World Bank (2018 stats), Sierra Leone has an adult literacy rate of 43%. While the male literacy rate in rural areas for the poorest men is 53%, and for the poorest females in rural areas it is just 25%, showing a big gap between the sexes.

We have found from our trainings that the economic empowerment of young women has a far wider effect on social inclusion of women and has contributed to a reduction in gender based violence. Aid targeting women's economic empowerment as the principal objective remains especially low, at USD 861 million in 2013-14. "This is just 2% of the aid going to the economic and productive sectors – a mere drop in the ocean." (OECD-DAC, 2016). Economic empowerment has long been considered a key component in interventions to reduce gender inequality, however evidence is hard to demonstrate. PCI are currently looking into researching the wider impact of economic empowerment on family members and on the wider community.

Over the last 40 years, PCI's mission has not changed: we are still in the business of "Empowering young people" and we remain inspired by the spirit and determination of youth.

