

Children's Radio Foundation

Africa is the youngest continent, with half of its population under the age of 25. But how often are young people in Africa given a platform to share their experiences and views?



Keith records ambient sound in Manenberg for a radio show about his neighbourhood, Cape Town (South Africa)

It's an uncomfortably hot February day in Mongu, Zambia. The whirring of the fan is overpowered by the chatter of 15 young people from Zambia as they plan a "show clock" for their first radio show. They have chosen the theme of Child Rights and are now deciding how the different elements of the broadcast will fit together.

It's a pivotal moment in the radio training they have undertaken, bringing together all they have learned in the past four days, so that they can produce their first radio show.

They decide that the most important elements of the programme are to ask people in the community what they know or understand about Child Rights, and to share youth opinions on the topic. As they develop their show clock the young reporters realise how much more they want to say, and decide to make their first show an Introduction to Children's Rights.

These young people are receiving training from the Children's Radio Foundation (CRF), a not-for-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. CRF provides the skills and tools to make the voices of African youth heard and to

start dialogues about important issues with their peers and the wider community.

Young people have a lot to think about, but they do not have many outlets through which they can speak about their challenges, voice their concerns, or share their triumphs and strategies for success. A simple idea powers the Children's Radio Foundation: impart the tools and skills needed to express ideas and share stories through radio and you will give them a springboard to a world of wider opportunities.

Working directly with community radio stations and local organisations, CRF uses the needs and strengths of the different communities they work in to create sustainable youth media projects. Each place and its people have specific needs and abilities which provide the framework for designing the projects.

CRF has active youth radio networks across Tanzania, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and South Africa. This means that collectively there are over 1000 youth reporters on air in Africa. Sixteen-year-old Bianca Mwela from Lusaka in Zambia reflected on her



Joyce and Amanda practice how to use the audio recorder, Kakata (Liberia)

radio training experience, "This has taught me that as young people we can use radio to express ourselves and I can now help other young people and my community share their points of view and get it out there for everyone to hear."

Young people need opportunities to tell their own stories and to learn from the experiences of others. CRF uses radio broadcasts as a "tool for talk". CRF's radio workshops allow young people not only to gain technical and IT skills, but also to reflect on their world. It is a chance for them to interview their peers, family and community members. It allows listeners to hear directly from young people about the issues that matter to them, such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, HIV and AIDS, poverty and malnutrition, gender inequality and access to education. Through youth-produced broadcasts they are able to break the traditional media stereotype that frames the young as victims of social issues and, at the same time, redressing the dominant adult point of view.



CRF youth reporters interview a community member on the rights of a child, Mongu (Zambia)

CRF also trains adults from community organisations and local radio stations to mentor youth radio projects. Alphonso Wright, a local trainer from Liberia says, "This is actually a new phenomenon in media activities in Liberia: working with young people and bringing them into the media field where they can run their own programmes and feel a part of the development process of our country."

What resonates most for young journalists from Liberia to South Africa is the impact the radio training has on their ability to express themselves confidently and to engage constructively with their community. Fifteen-year-old Bronwyn is from Manenberg, a neighborhood in Cape Town, South Africa which suffers from many social problems. She spoke of her experience with CRF, "Through the workshops I learnt more about my community and I got more clever asking questions to other people. Through radio, I learnt how to speak out loudly, more openly, so I think teenagers will find a way to talk through radio."

Creating platforms for young people to be able to express themselves and engage with their counterparts as well as the larger community allows them to be seen as more than just characters to substantiate news. Young people experience many issues featured in the media and fill diverse roles in their communities – they offer valuable perspectives and experiences.

Radio gives them a chance to tell their own stories. It's about time we started to listen.

To find out more about the Children's Radio Foundation, to become a Member or make a donation, please visit our website at:

www.childrensradiofoundation.org