

Tricia Young

Children: Social Actors and Co-Creators

Child to Child (CtC) is a child rights agency, championing children's right to have a voice and play a role in decisions affecting their lives. We have almost 40 years of developing agencies' capacities to embed our innovative and award-winning participatory approaches. CtC programmes typically engage the most vulnerable and marginalised children in the world, meaning that we often operate in situations of uncertainty. A narrow focus on academic education is not sufficient in these circumstances: education must be relevant to children's lives and the uncertain and rapidly changing contexts they find themselves in. **We believe that children are the experts on their own lives and that we need to listen to them to understand the issues they are grappling with if we are to develop learning resources and curricula which are meaningful and relevant. We further believe that children must be active partners in the delivery of these curricula, through using innovative child participatory methodologies that harness and build upon strengths.**

Our Getting Ready for School (GRS) programme is an innovative, child participatory early childhood education (ECE) programme aimed at increasing on-time enrolment and academic performance. We were halfway through implementing a 5-year GRS programme in Sierra Leone, when Ebola struck, forcing us to reconfigure our implementation model. We introduced a radio for education initiative: Pikin to Pikin Tok (literally Child to Child Talk in the local Krio).

PtPT was unique since it was co-produced in partnership with Ebola-affected children. The content of the PtPT series was tailored to respond to children's emerging needs, moving beyond a narrow focus on academic learning competences. Objectives included: building resilience in the aftermath of crisis; enabling young people to play an active role in transforming their communities; as well as emphasising core academic competences.

Education is and always will be one of the most important solutions to responding to crises and to breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty – but it will only be effective if it is relevant, meaningful and adapted to meet the needs of communities. Education should not be instrumentalised and valued only in relation to its contribution to future economic gains. Instead, at CtC we believe in the power of education to challenge social injustice. We promote a critical pedagogy that offers children spaces to critically reflect on their circumstances and equips them with the skills to take action on those issues that concern them.

The evaluation of PtPT demonstrated that children did indeed improve their academic competences. But they gained so much more. They acquired knowledge on how to prevent disease; how to stay safe; gender equality; teenage pregnancy. They developed a range of critical life-skills: risk assessment, critical thinking, problem solving, and team work to name but a few. We achieved this because **children had space to articulate their concerns and were engaged as active partners and change-makers when designing the response.** Engaging children in this way as partners for change is not only an effective way of supporting learning in resource-scarce conditions, it can have transformative effects on entire communities.