



A Youth Fellow gives a career counseling session to Opportunity Youth at a Youth Hub in Barwani, India.

CONNECTING RURAL YOUTH TO OPPORTUNITIES: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF YOUTH HUBS

MARCH 2024

Introduction

The [Global Opportunity Youth Network \(GOYN\)](#) is a multi-stakeholder partnership committed to catalyzing place-based systems shifts in communities – cities and rural districts – around the world to create sustainable economic opportunities for “Opportunity Youth” (OY), aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Created in 2018, GOYN’s current network is comprised of 16 communities in India, Africa and Latin America, with plans to expand to 14 more by the end of 2024.

GOYN started working in rural India in 2020 in partnership with the Transform Rural India Foundation (TRI), a leading local non-profit with deep experience creating sustainable models of empowerment and economic development for rural communities. TRI first launched GOYN in the Ramgarh district (Jharkhand) in 2020, before replicating the approach in the Barwani district (Madhya Pradesh) in 2021. Together, the two districts represent a population of over 550,000 Opportunity Youth.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Country: India

Communities: Ramgarh (Jharkhand) and Barwani (Madhya Pradesh)

Opportunity Youth population: 550,000

Main barriers to youth economic opportunities: low levels of local economic activity, lack of access to information on jobs and self-employment opportunities, low quality of skilling programs, low awareness of available government support services

GOYN start date: 2020 (Ramgarh), 2021 (Barwani)

GOYN Anchor Partner: Transform Rural India Foundation (TRI)

Opportunity Youth reached by GOYN since 2020: 32,200+

In both Ramgarh and Barwani, TRI established phygital (digitally-enabled physical spaces) Youth Hubs to support the implementation of the GOYN approach, working in close partnership with local government stakeholders. This case study details the critical role that these Youth Hubs play in connecting rural Indian youth to services and opportunities in their communities.

The context

Ramgarh (Jharkhand) and Barwani (Madhya Pradesh) are two rural communities experiencing high levels of youth unemployment and informal employment. Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand are among the poorest states in India. The Ramgarh and Barwani districts are primarily agrarian, practicing seasonal, rain-fed agriculture. Average income ranges between INR 30,000 (~US\$360) and INR 60,000 (~US\$720) per household per annum.

TRI initially started applying the GOYN approach in Ramgarh. Several factors influenced that choice, including the presence of a strong multi-stakeholder ecosystem, local industries and a supportive district administration, as well as a close proximity to the state capital, a railway line and major highways. There was also a clear need: nearly 70% of the youth in Ramgarh, or about 250,000, are Opportunity Youth, and the district faces high levels of outward migration.

Finally, Ramgarh is classified as an Aspirational District by the NITI Aayog¹, making it an ideal location to demonstrate the value of the GOYN approach in rural India and inspire other districts to replicate it.

The success of GOYN in Ramgarh led to the replication of the approach in Barwani, another Aspirational District home to over 300,000 Opportunity Youth. Barwani's strategic location and local infrastructure offer potential for the growth of industries in the region, and the city has witnessed an upsurge in entrepreneurial activities after the pandemic. Yet, 82% of youth lack skills and struggle to access employment, a challenge that threatens Barwani's promising future and calls for a new approach to address the issue.



The challenge

In Ramgarh and Barwani, TRI identified three key issues preventing young people from accessing employment services and economic opportunities in their community:

1. Rural Opportunity Youth **lack access to effective counseling and orientation services** to guide them towards available training and employment opportunities. Distance and isolation make Opportunity Youth hard to reach by service providers.
2. Multiple programs, including government programs, are available to support rural Opportunity Youth, but youth are either **unaware of these supports or find them complex and difficult to access** due to the scattered nature of interventions.
3. Digital platforms and technologies have significant potential to support rural youth by providing access to information, training and livelihoods opportunities. However, **Opportunity Youth struggle to leverage these tools** due to a lack of access to devices, data and know-how (for example, in Ramgarh, only 51% of young people have access to their own device).

¹ National Institution for Transforming India, a government agency which acts as the leading public policy think tank for the Government of India.

These issues suggested a need to centralize information, resources and support for rural Opportunity Youth into “one stop shops” designed to meet their needs and equipped with the appropriate staff and tools to navigate existing opportunities.

“The biggest challenge with staying in Barwani is the unavailability of youth safe spaces in villages, with almost no career counseling. All the skilling centres are located in the district’s headquarters, making access difficult, especially for young girls.”

- NANDITA GOLE (GOYN YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER, BARWANI)

The approach

Based on these issues, TRI worked with community stakeholders to create digitally-enabled physical spaces where rural Opportunity Youth could explore all available services in one place (counseling, training, mentoring, job search assistance, entrepreneurship support, etc.) and receive guidance on how to navigate existing opportunities: **Youth Hubs**.

What is the function of Youth Hubs?

Youth Hubs have four objectives:

- **Centralize information** about available opportunities to help Opportunity Youth make informed choices
- **Offer end-to-end career development solutions** to rural youth, including orientation services, counseling, apprenticeship and skilling opportunities, job preparedness and post-placement support
- **Facilitate connections** between young jobseekers and employers
- **Foster rural entrepreneurship** by helping Opportunity Youth develop and implement viable business ideas

Where are Hubs located?

Youth Hubs are set up in locations that are easily accessible by Opportunity Youth and designed to feel safe and welcoming to all young people. For example, in Barwani, Youth Hubs have been established within Cluster Level Federation (CLF) offices. CLFs are part of India’s National Rural Livelihoods Mission, a flagship program by the Ministry of Rural Development, and serve as intermediaries, promoting collaboration among Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community-based organizations within specific clusters. As CLF offices are used as community spaces by women belonging to SHGs, they are known as safe spaces amongst youth. Using CLFs to set up Youth Hubs also means that Hubs are located near government offices, and can be regularly visited by government officials that wish to engage with local Opportunity Youth.

Who manages the Hubs?

Hubs are manned by Hub Managers, trained staff that can provide guidance to young people visiting the hubs based on their needs and aspirations. In addition, Hubs employ community mobilizers (“Sarathis”) to carry out outreach to Opportunity Youth and their parents and engage with Opportunity Youth throughout their journey.

What services do the Hubs provide?

When a young person visits a Hub for the first time, they first register onto TRI’s digital platform. They are then offered a psychometric assessment (personality test) as well as a personalized career report and counseling session. This enables Hub Managers to guide youth towards one of four possible pathways: entrepreneurship, formal employment, vocational training or a return to formal education. Additional services and opportunities are available for each of these pathways.

Sarathis follow up with young people after their visit to the Hub and record details on their progress through TRI's digital platform. This enables TRI to anticipate when a young person may need extra support (e.g., transition from training to employment) and over time, to learn which interventions are most effective to support youth employment and entrepreneurship.

How are other community stakeholders involved with Youth Hubs?

Reflecting the place-based collaboration ethos at the heart of the GOYN approach, Youth Hubs rely on comprehensive partnerships with local stakeholders to provide the information and opportunities made available to Opportunity Youth through the Hubs. This includes skilling providers, employers and employment agencies, financial service providers and youth-supporting organizations. TRI carefully selects partners to ensure they provide quality services to young people, and works closely with them to keep the information available at the Hubs up to date. Partnerships are formalized through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

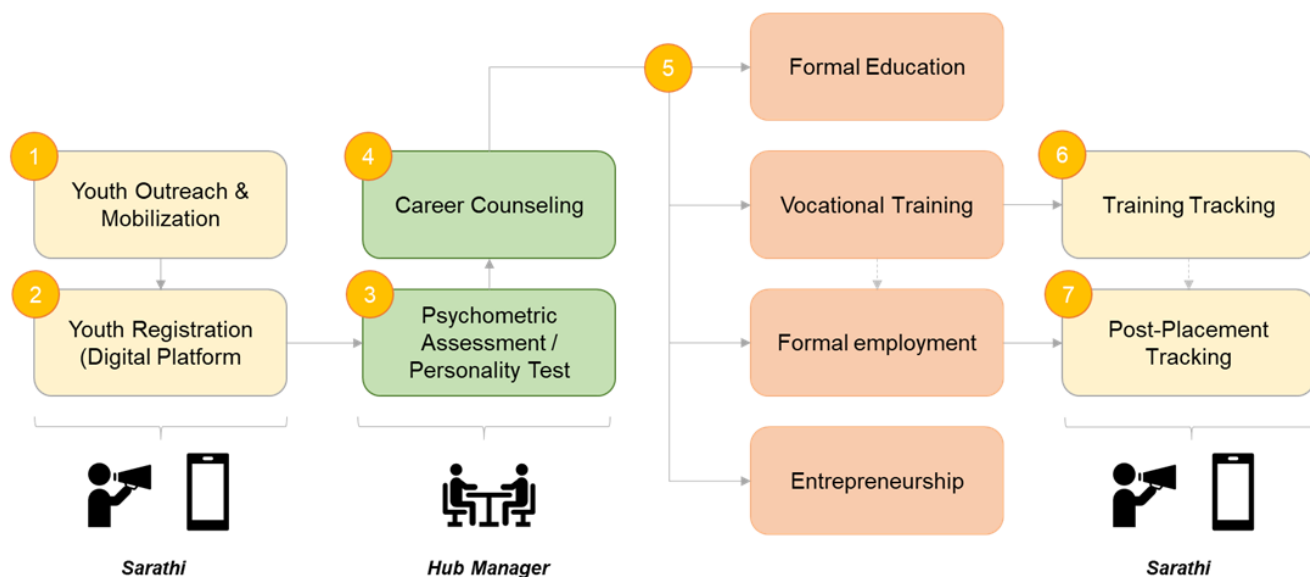
Formal partnerships with state and district administration departments and agencies are especially important for Youth Hubs, in several ways:

- The physical spaces hosting Youth Hubs are government buildings made available for free to TRI/GOYN
- Youth Hubs are an essential source of information about government programs and benefits
- Government representatives regularly visit Hubs to meet and discuss directly with Opportunity Youth

YOUTH HUBS - BENEFITS FOR PARTNERS

- Expanding reach
- Accessing pooled resources
- Connecting with and leveraging other organizations
- Sharing information and learning

YOUTH HUB – PROCESS OVERVIEW



"Before, I had no idea that you could plan a business step-by-step, even for a small local mobile repair shop. The 7-day Accelerated Entrepreneurship training program provided by the Youth Hub transformed me into what felt like a skilled businessperson. The training boosted my confidence, and the financial help I received from a private organization, after facing multiple rejections from banks, solidified my belief in both Youth Hubs and GOYN."

- PAWAN JAMRE (20), MOBILE REPAIR SHOP OWNER, BARWANI

The impact

The first Youth Hub opened its doors in Ramgarh in 2021. There are now 11 Youth Hubs in Ramgarh and eight in Barwani, which each receive an average of 20 to 30 young people every week.

Over the past three years, across Ramgarh and Barwani, Youth Hubs have:

- Welcomed over **30,600** Opportunity Youth
- Helped **3,000** Opportunity Youth register for skilling courses
- Facilitated the placement of **2,500** Opportunity Youth into formal jobs
- Supported the start or growth of over **1,000** youth-led businesses
- Provided career counseling support to **2,700** college students through Youth hub career coaches
- Helped **5,400** Opportunity Youth access essential services, including government benefits
- Helped over **3,500** young farmers to increase their income through trainings, access to entitlements and other services

Beyond these metrics, Youth Hubs have become a place to celebrate youth voices and a single-stop solution center that caters to youth challenges and aspirations. Youth Hubs have also enabled Opportunity Youth to attend virtual leadership workshops led by renowned organizations and political leaders. Opportunity Youth are now actively engaging in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan, a participatory and decentralized planning process developed by the Department of Rural Development which brings together citizens and their elected representatives. Through this process, Opportunity Youth are helping design and implement development plans for villages and making themselves heard. Many young *sarpanches* (community-elected local leaders) are being trained through Youth Hubs on good governance practices, government policy frameworks and how to use public communication channels to influence public policies effectively.

YOUTH HUBS - LESSONS LEARNED

Key success factors

- Strong community partnerships
- Targeted youth outreach strategy
- Comprehensive range of services provided

Risks and challenges

- Lack of community engagement
- Partner management issues
- Long-term financial sustainability



Visit of a GOYN Youth Hub in Barwani by the Ministry of Rural Development Joint Secretary, CEO of the Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihood Mission, District Magistrate and other government officials (August 2023).

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

GOYN defines systems change as a change in the barriers and underlying drivers of youth economic opportunity that leads to **long-term, sustainable change at scale in the community**.

Youth Hubs address a fundamental systemic challenge for youth in rural India by providing them with safe, welcoming spaces to receive guidance and access quality information about opportunities available to them. Because Youth Hubs are set up and managed in partnership with many other stakeholders in the community, including government stakeholders, they are **locally-driven** and **designed for long-term sustainability**. Youth Hubs also **operate at scale**, with each Hub able to welcome several hundreds of Opportunity Youth annually, and are **easily replicable** with the right partnerships in place.

Looking forward

TRI started expanding the GOYN and Youth Hub approach to 13 new rural communities in 2023. By the end of 2024, TRI expects to scale to 250 Youth Hubs (with government and partner organizations) across Ramgarh, Barwani and these new communities (a total of 15 districts), serving an estimated 1,000,000 Opportunity Youth.

Other stakeholders have expressed an interest in replicating the Youth Hub approach and bringing it to scale. For example, the Madhya Pradesh government is planning to open 150 Youth Hubs in several districts in 2024, which would benefit millions of Opportunity Youth across the state.



The director of RSETI, a government skilling centre, addresses Opportunity Youth at the Rajpur Youth Hub in Barwani (June 2023).

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The Aspen Institute
2300 N Street, NW | Suite 700 | Washington, DC 20037
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This case study was developed with the support of GOYN Global Partners GDI and Catholic Relief Services.

