



Focus group facilitated by GOYN Thiès during the design process of the local GOYN strategy.

# BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE: A GOYN THIÈS CASE STUDY

DECEMBER 2024

## Introduction

The [Global Opportunity Youth Network](#) (GOYN) is a multi-stakeholder partnership aimed at driving systemic change locally to create sustainable economic opportunities for 'Opportunity Youth' (OY)—young people aged 15 to 29 (15 to 35 in Senegal) who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or are in informal jobs. Established in 2018, GOYN currently operates in 16 communities across India, Africa, and Latin America, with plans to expand to 14 additional communities by the end of 2025..

GOYN was launched in Thiès in 2021 and is currently led by Eclosio, a leading local non-profit organization focused on the socio-economic integration of populations made vulnerable by exclusion. The Thiès region, whose capital is the city of Thiès, is one of the fourteen administrative regions of Senegal. It is located west of Dakar, the capital. The region is organized into three departments: M'Bour, Thiès and Tivaouane. Youth aged 15-35 represent roughly 35% of the population or approximately 800,000 young people, half of whom (401,000) are considered by

### COMMUNITY PROFILE

**Country:** Senegal

**Community:** Thiès

**Number of Opportunity Youth:** 401,000

**Date of establishment of GOYN:** 2021

**GOYN Anchor Partner:** Eclosio

**Main drivers of youth unemployment:**  
Lack of relevant training, lack of access to financing and information on existing opportunities in priority sectors

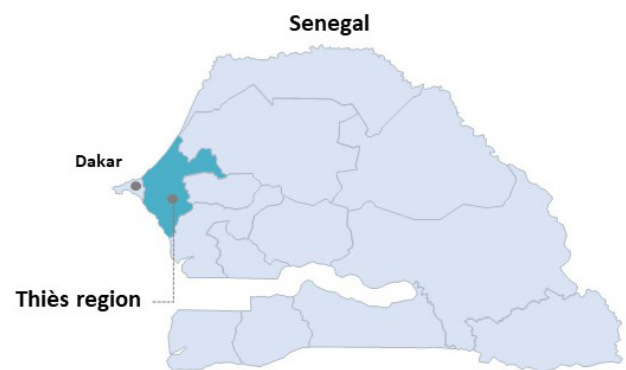
GOYN to be “Opportunity Youth”. This population is growing by 5.7% a year, with nearly 10,000 young people entering the job market in Thiès every year.

In close collaboration with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Haskè Consulting, GOYN Thiès led a mapping exercise of the region’s youth employment ecosystem. This research included numerous focus groups with young people and highlighted the lack of involvement of young people in the decision-making processes that concern them. This is leading to a mismatch between young people’s expectations and the decisions taken by key stakeholders working on youth issues (public sector and civil society).

This case study details the approach adopted by GOYN Thiès to address this challenge by championing an inclusive and productive partnership with the youth that places them at the core of the design and implementation processes of youth-focused initiatives.

## The context

Although Senegal has consistently achieved significant economic growth (+6% annually), this has not translated into a proportional rise in decent job opportunities (only a 3.4% increase in Thiès). In the Thiès region, youth unemployment is driven by several structural challenges. Despite being one of Senegal’s most dynamic areas with opportunities in agriculture, crafts, and services, the employment rate is just 52%. High youth unemployment is worsened by a lack of adequate training and technical skills, limiting access to stable, well-paying jobs. Formal employment represents only 4% of available jobs, pushing many young people toward the informal sector or emigration in search of better economic prospects. While efforts to improve youth employability, such as training programs, are underway, the mismatch between job supply and market needs remains a significant barrier. This gap fuels feelings of frustration and hopelessness among young people in Thiès, impacting their participation in the region’s socio-economic activities



## The challenge

GOYN Thiès has identified three primary hurdles limiting youth community engagement in the region:

1. **Limited youth representation and inclusion in decision-making processes:** youth are often excluded from decisions that affect them, preventing their voices from being heard and their aspirations recognized. This marginalization is particularly acute for specific groups, such as youth with disabilities, youth in conflict with the law, and young women.
2. **Limited local employment opportunities:** young people in Thiès have limited professional opportunities, leading to feelings of hopelessness. This lack of prospects sometimes drives them to seek alternative solutions, such as emigration, and to disengage from youth-related issues.
3. **Limited soft skills and low self-confidence:** youth often lack essential soft skills and self-confidence, hindering their ability to assert themselves, make informed decisions, and take on leadership roles in their communities. This skills gap restricts their active participation in community life.

## The approach

To tackle these challenges, GOYN Thiès has put in place an integrated and inclusive youth engagement strategy, which aims to actively involve young people in decision-making processes and to strengthen their role in the region's development. This strategy focuses on three main areas:

1. **Creating the necessary structures** to facilitate youth engagement and partnership
2. **Establishing specific processes** to ensure inclusion of the most marginalized youth and equal access to opportunities
3. **Investing to develop** young people's skills and projects

### *Institutionalizing youth engagement*

The creation of Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) is at the heart of this strategy. Since its inception, GOYN has applied a well-defined methodology to design and co-create solutions to address youth unemployment in close collaboration with the youth. In each GOYN community, this methodology centers on the establishment of a structured Youth Advisory Group (YAG), which works closely with GOYN's local partner and other stakeholders in the community. YAG members inform and contribute to the development of GOYN's strategy in the community, support the design and implementation of GOYN's interventions, and act as GOYN ambassadors among their peers.

In the Thiès region, Eclasio has chosen to establish three YAGs, introduced in stages in the three departments, starting with Mbour in 2022, followed by Thiès in 2023, and finally Tivaouane in 2024. This progressive strategy ensures complete geographical coverage of the region and adaptation to the local context of each department. YAG mem-

bers are selected via a transparent and participatory process, including awareness-raising visits, pre-selection based on gender and representation equity, and lastly an election process for members. Each YAG is made up of 15 to 18 members representing various social groups, including young people with disabilities, those who have been in conflict with the law and young women. Eclasio plays a coordination role for each of the three YAG's, with a central office that supports the organization of the YAGs' activities and facilitates communication and collaboration between the different groups through digital tools, such as WhatsApp groups.

Critically, members of the YAG are involved in co-designing GOYN strategies and interventions in the community and represent voices of their peers in this process, contributing to greater ownership of interventions. For instance, a member of the Mbour YAG initiated the organization of a training activity on tree nursery production. The member spearheaded the whole process by i) identifying the needs of the youth with regard to nursery production, ii) assessing the feasibility and impact potential of this activity in the community, iii) engaging local authorities to involve them in the implementation, and iv) selecting the trainer and creating a feedback loop to evaluate the impact of the training on the youth and broader community.

YAG members also play a pivotal role in advocacy and community action. Notably, YAGs work closely with local authorities and other partners to support their initiatives and ensure that youth voices and priorities are



Training workshop on nursery production and marketing techniques organized by a member of the Mbour YAG.

integrated into local policies. They also help young people in their communities to develop their capacities in this area. For example, a member of the Tivaouane YAG organized a capacity-building workshop on leadership, public speaking, active listening and storytelling for young people in his community.

## A GLOBAL NETWORK

In addition to their regular meetings in Thiès, YAG members also benefit from global meetings with the youth from other GOYN communities across the GOYN global network. The global network organizes virtual meetings on a regular basis, and every year a GOYN community hosts a face-to-face gathering (convening) attended by two young people from each GOYN community.

These international exchanges and connections enable young people to engage with other communities, to realize that the challenges they face are shared, and to strengthen their leadership by learning from the practices and knowledge shared by others, motivating them to intensify their own local engagement.

### *Ensuring inclusion and strengthening equity*

Inclusion is a core principle of the YAGs, which actively involve youth from marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, returning migrants, and young people with criminal records. This involves regular meetings and awareness campaigns to ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes and activities. Each YAG must include at least five young people from these groups.

In 2023-2024, GOYN Thiès participated in the design and implementation of the Equity Leadership Program (ELP), a youth leadership development initiative coordinated by GOYN Global but fully created and run by local youth. Two young people from Thiès, including one with a disability, were selected to help shape the program by sharing their personal experiences related to equity. In 2025, all GOYN Thiès YAG members will benefit from the ELP.

To ensure successful integration of equity, awareness-raising and training activities have been organized for youth in social reintegration (particularly those who have been in conflict with the law). These activities aim to restore their confidence and facilitate their social and professional reintegration. The training focuses on three key areas: leadership, soft skills, and the use of digital tools.

*"We are young leaders who are very committed to the noble causes of our community, particularly issues related to young people and especially young women. We love discovering new opportunities and getting to know new people."*

- AMINATA DIOUF (OPPORTUNITY YOUTH) &  
MAGATTE DIOP (VICE PRESIDENT OF THE THIÈS YAG)

### *Developing skills and promoting innovation*

YAG members actively participate in training courses designed to develop their leadership skills and their knowledge of civic and professional structures and processes. The initial training sessions, led by external consultants, have now evolved into an internal mentoring approach, enabling young people already skilled in these areas to train their peers.

YAG members also organize activities for young people in their community, such as capacity-building, awareness-raising, and experience-sharing sessions and civic actions. These activities aim to help youth develop practical skills and strengthen youth engagement beyond the YAGs. To date, these activities have covered a wide range of topics, including training in organic farming, animal husbandry and dyeing techniques, and links to professional opportunities in the Thiès region.

In partnership with GOYN Global, GOYN Thiès also enabled five innovative projects designed by the youth to access US\$5,000 in seed funding through the Youth Innovation Fund (YIF). The selection process

for YIF-supported projects is designed to ensure youth participation. Firstly, an awareness-raising and information-sharing phase was carried out within the YAGs to inform young people of the opportunity offered by the YIF. Posters were put up with all the relevant information on the YIF and the selection criteria, to ensure total transparency. An application form was drawn up to collect project proposals, making it easier to submit ideas.

YAG members then reached out to Opportunity Youth, encouraging them to participate and submit their project ideas. After receiving applications, a preliminary selection process assessed each project's alignment with the established criteria. A design thinking workshop (an innovation management method that involves users in a co-creation process) was then held to refine the pre-selected projects, helping participants to further develop their solutions. Finally, a final selection process determined which projects would receive YIF support, enabling the most promising initiatives to move forward. The five selected projects focus on improving the environment and youth employability by training youth on waste reduction, creating community gardens, providing mental health support, and promoting youth-friendly health services. Each project selected had to take equity issues into consideration in its design. The environmental focus of GOYN Thiès projects sets them apart within the global network, serving as an inspiration for young innovators in other GOYN communities.



Poster designed by GOYN Thiès to request Youth Innovation Fund proposals.



Design thinking workshop for project leaders shortlisted for the Youth Innovation Fund.

## The impact

The activities in Thiès have had a significant and positive impact on young people and their communities. The 47 members of the YAGs have gained valuable skills that enable them to organize and lead sessions with other local Opportunity Youth. Additionally, this experience has greatly strengthened their leadership, public speaking abilities, self-confidence, and capacity to engage in decision-making on youth issues. They actively contribute to the Thiès multi-sectoral advisory group, which unites regional stakeholders working on youth employment issues. Two members of the Thiès YAG have been recognized as “champions” by local authorities and are consulted in youth-related decision-making bodies. They also serve as information relays, helping to raise their peers’ awareness of available services and opportunities in their communities.

By institutionalizing youth engagement, fostering an inclusive approach, and investing in the development of young people’s skills and projects, GOYN Thiès aims to create an environment that empowers youth expression. This approach offers young people opportunities for leadership and personal growth while addressing the unique needs of their communities. This integrated, partnership-based strategy strengthens the role of young people in regional development, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in decisions that impact them.

Furthermore, YAG members now play an active role in engaging local and administrative authorities, soliciting their support for YAG initiatives benefiting young people in their communities. Thanks to the YIF, 15 Opportunity Youth have become aware of the importance of community action and are now actively involved in the development of the areas where they live, contributing to local dynamism and promoting community solidarity. The YIF projects described above are also expected to reach over 1,500 young people in the Thiès region.

*"We are committed, ambitious young leaders dedicated to advancing our country's development. Through innovative, socially impactful projects, we aim to support those in need while promoting inclusion. By engaging with the GOYN initiative, we are confident in our ability to make a meaningful difference and achieve our mission."*

- DEMBA WADE (PRESIDENT OF THE THIÈS YAG), SERIGNE SALIOU NDIAYE (DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THIÈS YAG) & ADAMA DIOP (HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS, THIÈS YAG)

## SYSTEMIC IMPACT

GOYN defines systemic change as the reduction of underlying barriers to economic opportunities for young people, resulting in large-scale, sustainable transformations within the community.

In the GOYN Thiès community, youth engagement activities drive systemic change by supporting young people to actively participate in designing and implementing initiatives that impact their lives. These activities strengthen youth leadership, fostering interventions that are more relevant and better aligned with young people's needs. This engagement also creates a lasting shift in how young people are perceived in the region, emphasizing their skills and potential to contribute productively to their community.

## Looking forward

GOYN Thiès is strengthening its partnership approach with young people in the region. The next steps include implementing the ELP program, launching YIF-supported projects, and hosting Youth Engagement Days—a job forum organized by YAG members. This event will feature training workshops, networking, information on opportunities, a competition for innovative projects, and other support activities for young jobseekers. Additionally, ongoing support will be provided for YAG-led initiatives, amplifying young voices in local governance and influencing youth-friendly policies, as well as fostering youth participation in co-creating and scaling initiatives.

As a backdrop to these activities, GOYN Thiès is seeking to evolve the management of its youth engagement activities. Initially, these activities were mainly funded by GOYN. The new approach now encourages young people to seek funding and logistical support from local authorities and other stakeholders. This strategy aims to strengthen their engagement, expand the scope of activities offered to Opportunity Youth and increase the resources available to finance them.

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