

Transforming Youth Years in Senegal: Developing a Youth Venture Program with Ashoka Sahel

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Though people claim that “today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders” the reality is that in continents such as Africa where youth make up more than half of the population of countries, it is essential for youth to be active participants today. Youth all over the world have a role to play in their own development as well as the development of their communities which goes beyond having just ‘a voice’ or a symbolic presence; it signifies being an active agent of change (UNICEF, 2007). In Senegal, the development of a Youth Social Entrepreneurship Program by Ashoka aims to learn how to tap into the large resource that youth can offer. The Ashoka Youth Venture Program is therefore designed to be a hands-on, experiential process that guides young people through the journey of being change-makers and in turn launching and leading their own socially benefitting ventures (Haynes 2015). This paper aims to explore the process of designing and adapting the Ashoka Youth Venture Program to the context of Senegal. It is important to understand the context social entrepreneurship in Senegal, especially the challenges that youth face, the skills or resources they may need, the dynamics of starting a social venture, and the key stakeholders or organizations in place who tackle related issues. The methods therefore consist in carrying out a needs assessment by conducting focus groups with youth/students from high schools and universities followed by a short pilot session to introduce some of the program curriculum as a means to better identify the needs of youth and get useful feedback. Additionally, the current approach that local schools and universities already in partnership with Ashoka may have towards youth social entrepreneurship is assessed by administering interviews with high school and university officials or instructors. Integrating youth social entrepreneurship within or complimentary to the education systems in Senegal is essential in giving young people the experience they need to gain the confidence and support to be successful in not only leading their own projects, but also in developing the skills they need to be powerful change-makers now and throughout life (Haynes, 2015). In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 for achieving inclusive and quality education for all, it reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. Recommendations based on needs assessment and best practices will therefore be provided on how to contextualize a social entrepreneurship education and training program for youth in Senegal.