CAPITALIZING ON YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND THE FIGHT AGAINST HARMFUL PRACTICES IN SENEGAL

POWER TO YOUTH
CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU(TH)

amref health africa

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

AC ACTION 4 CHANGE

Introduction

The Power To You(th) (PtY) programme was conceived in response to the limited representation of youth — especially adolescent girls and young women — in decision-making spaces and their persistent exposure to harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, and gender-based violence (GBV). Implemented by Amref Health Africa in West Africa in partnership with Action For Change, the PtY programme focused on youth empowerment through leadership development and advocacy in five regions of Senegal: Dakar, Thiès, Fatick, Matam, and Diourbel.

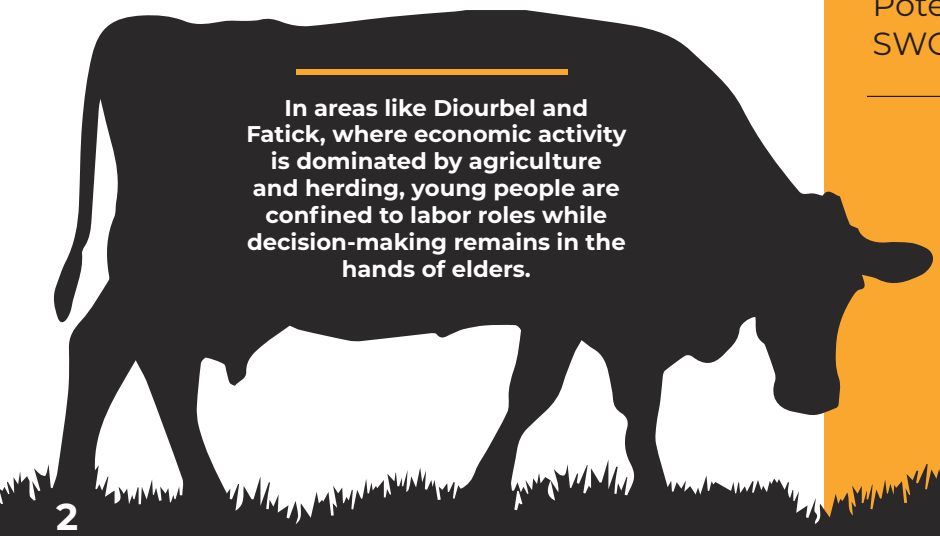
Context and Challenges

Although Senegal's national legal framework supports youth rights, social norms and traditional governance systems continue to inhibit youth inclusion. In areas like Diourbel and Fatick, where economic activity is dominated by agriculture and herding, young people are confined to labor roles while decision-making remains in the hands of elders.

This traditional structuring hinders youth engagement, cultivates misonéism, and perpetuates exclusion.

Additionally, regional disparities exacerbate issues:

- In Guédiawaye (urban), FGM persists despite strong institutional presence.
- In Matam and Kanel (remote), early marriages and GBV remain prevalent due to entrenched conservatism.



Purpose of the Report

This learning brief aims to document good practices, results, and lessons learned from the PtY project over a four-year period, and to propose recommendations for scaling and sustaining successful interventions.

Methodology

The capitalisation process involved:

12 intervention districts across 5 regions.

41 interviews and 16 focus groups conducted.

Over 100 documents and reports reviewed.

SEPO (Successes, Echecs, Potentialités, Obstacles) and SWOT matrices used for analysis.

Targeted Groups

- Adolescents and young people
- Youth organizations and community actors
- Local government and administrative authorities
- Religious and traditional leaders

Key Findings and Discussions

1. Youth Participation in Decision-Making

Achievements

- Over **8,000 youth** reached through training in leadership, local governance, advocacy, and budgeting.
- **80+ youth organization**s engaged in decision-making processes.
- **80+ youth** participated in budget orientation sessions (DOB) at local and regional levels.
- Multiple youth have taken on local leadership roles including positions in the national assembly and local councils.
- Members of the platform Cii Laa Bokk appointed to strategic positions, including **Secretary of State.**

Good Practices

Citizen Hearings & Public Audits: Created dialogue between youth and authorities, leading to the creation of **youth-dedicated budget lines** in municipalities like Diourbel.

Municipal Engagement: In Mbour and Thiès, mayors presented mid-term performance reports to youth, promoting transparency.

Youth Innovation: Ideas from youth have inspired **new municipal initiatives,** including civic education campaigns and participatory budgeting.

Challenges

- Limited training access for youth in remote areas.
- Some local officials remained inaccessible (e.g., mayor of Fatick).
- Lack of youth inclusion in formal school programs.
- Inadequate parental engagement in youth development programs.

2. Reduction of Harmful Practices

Achievements

- **70+ radio broadcasts** and digital campaigns addressing FGM, early marriage, and GBV.
- **100+ community dialogues** conducted with local leaders and families.
- **20+ advocacy initiatives** led by youth and CSOs at local and national levels.
- **10+ official commitments** signed by local authorities to support youth-led SRHR actions.
- Creation and activation of **girls' clubs** and engagement of **grandmother leaders** in all five regions.

70+ radio broadcasts

100+ community dialogues

20+ advocacy initiatives

10+ official commitments

Creation and activation of girls' clubs

Good Practices

"Comprendre pour Agir" Modules: Strengthened local understanding of gender-transformative approaches and national strategies on gender equity.

Foires Régionales: Facilitated cross-regional exchange of experiences and best practices among youth and authorities.

Budget Allocation for SRHR: Municipalities like Dalla Ngabou committed resources, including provision of **sanitary products for schoolgirls.**

Challenges

- Cultural and religious resistance, particularly in Diourbel and Matam.
- Persistent exclusion of marginalized groups (e.g., youth with disabilities).
- Limited funding to scale outreach in underserved communities.

Recommendations

Strategic

- **Institutionalize youth platforms** and provide legal recognition.
- Reinforce a**dvocacy towards national institutions** (Parliament, Ministries).
- Promot**e intergenerational dialogue and community-based mentorship.**
- Integrate youth-focused content into **school curricula** and civic education.

Operational

- Expand training coverage, including **hard-to-reach areas and** school-based programs.
- Equip CSOs with **logistical resources** and **media tools.**
- Produce a **documentary** capturing successful practices for wider dissemination.
- Continue engaging **religious and traditional leaders** to enhance legitimacy of messaging.

Sustainability

- Encourage **local government investment,** such as municipal budget lines for youth programs.
- Extend youth platforms to **new regions** using tested models.
- Establish permanent mechanisms for y**outh accountability and feedback** in local governance.

Conclusion

The PtY project has cultivated a vibrant, youth - led civic movement across Senegal. By equipping young people with the tools and platforms to participate in governance and challenge harmful practices, the project has laid a strong foundation for inclusive development. The challenge now lies in sustaining this momentum, institutionalising youth voices, and reinforcing the systems that support them.

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