





THE FUTURE IS YOUNG
LEARNING SERIES

PARTNERING, MOBILIZING, CONNECTING:

GOYN's Approach to Youth Engagement

October 2022

GDI Global Development Incubator

GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK
THE FUTURE IS YOUNG
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INTRODUCING GOYN'S "THE FUTURE IS YOUNG" LEARNING SERIES

The Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN) is a multi-stakeholder initiative committed to catalyzing place-based systems shifts in communities –cities and rural districts– around the world through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities for "Opportunity Youth," aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Created in 2018, GOYN's current network is comprised of nine communities in India, Africa and Latin America, which together represent over three million such young people. Over the next decade, GOYN aims to directly produce positive outcomes for at least 350,000 youth globally and improve lives for millions more, build community-based Collaboratives that can coordinate work to improve the youth employment ecosystem, and catalyze systemic shifts to accelerate youth participation, opportunity, and equity, ultimately contributing to more peaceful, vibrant communities.

GOYN's *'The Future is Young'* Learning Series seeks to identify and present scalable solutions for youth economic opportunity that can inspire others to act. This second installment makes the case for investing in young people and presents the cornerstone of GOYN's approach: the creation of Collaborative Infrastructure for scaled impact and systemic change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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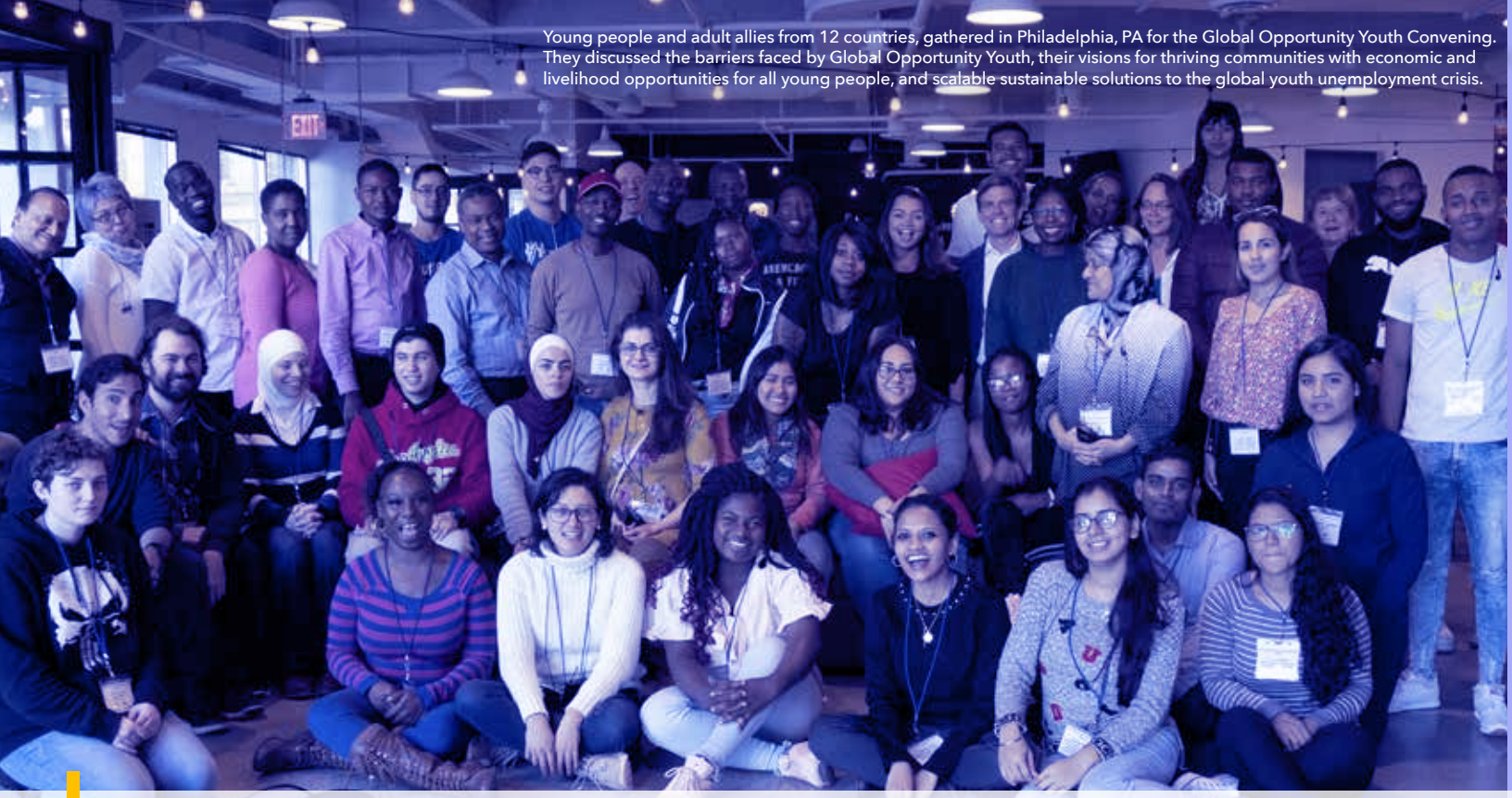
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Young people and adult allies from 12 countries, gathered in Philadelphia, PA for the Global Opportunity Youth Convening. They discussed the barriers faced by Global Opportunity Youth, their visions for thriving communities with economic and livelihood opportunities for all young people, and scalable sustainable solutions to the global youth unemployment crisis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOYN's approach to youth engagement is centered around youth agency. GOYN works to increase access to dignified, productive and sustainable employment and entrepreneurship pathways for "Opportunity Youth" (OY) – youth aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Supporting a young person's well-being and helping them to develop a sense of belonging and purpose through meaningful engagement and action is a critical part of this work to enable them to build the necessary agency to desire and work towards personal success. Meaningful youth engagement also opens up a world of possibilities for adults and adult-led institutions by breathing new life into repeated conversations and inspiring new possibilities by shifting the focus from asking "why?" to asking "why not?".

The approach highlighted in this Learning Brief builds upon decades of work by other youth organizations. Thirty years ago, the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework[1] revolutionized how youth-serving organizations viewed the young people they engaged with by appreciating their lived-experience as assets, creating caring and nurturing environments, promoting youth agency and

[1] In the 1990s, Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment presented the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development: Confidence (a sense of self-worth and mastery; having a sense of self-efficacy and belief in one's capacity to succeed); Character (taking responsibility; a sense of independence and individuality; connection to principles and values); Connection (a sense of safety, structure, and belonging; positive bonds with people and social institutions); Competence (the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work); and Contribution (active participation and leadership in a variety of settings; making a difference). In 2007, Richard Lerner proposed a 6th C - Caring (a sense of sympathy and empathy for others; commitment to social justice).

ownership of their lives, and creating a sense of hope for young people while tapping into their aspirations and talent. GOYN's work builds on the principles of the PYD framework in two ways: first, by emphasizing the need for a genuine *partnership* with young people, and second, by focusing on engaging OY (as opposed to all youth), who are often deemed too hard to reach or seen as less valuable contributors, and therefore left behind in youth engagement activities.

In each global community, GOYN partners follow the same four **Core Practices** when engaging Opportunity Youth:

1. **Valuing and amplifying the voices of Opportunity Youth through meaningful youth engagement.**
   An asset-based lens invites young people to share their voice in a way that lifts their talents, lived experiences and aspirations for the future. This approach respects four core principles: lift and amplify young people's narrative without exploiting it, respect and value young people's time, remove barriers to participation and finally be an adult ally and partner.

2. **Engaging Opportunity Youth as partners in the co-creation and design of solutions to youth unemployment.**
   This methodology is centered around the establishment of a structured Youth Advisory Group (YAG), which works closely with the GOYN Anchor Partner[2] and other stakeholders in the community. As partners, OY are viewed as experts in their lived experiences and engaged throughout all phases of GOYN's work not simply the beginning or end.

3. **Supporting and mobilizing Opportunity Youth as leaders in their communities.**
   Reaching, engaging, and supporting young people to formulate and implement interventions that address local barriers to youth economic opportunities is central to GOYN's approach. As an example, through the GOYN Youth Innovation Fund, we provide financial and capacity building support for OY to design and implement local projects focused on issues related to environmental sustainability, promoting diverse and inclusive communities, and the effects of youth unemployment.

4. **Connecting Opportunity Youth to a global platform to share and inspire others.**
   One of the unique features of GOYN is its ability to bring OY from different communities, countries and continents together into a global peer-to-peer network. Through GOYN, OY have started a unique dialogue with other young people experiencing the impacts of systemic inequities (such as those related to gender, race, ethnicity or social class, among others). GOYN actively supports this global dialogue by creating spaces for OY to connect and exchange ideas across GOYN communities.

Through these four Core Practices of youth engagement, GOYN opens up the world to a new and hopeful reality where there is a mindset shift around OY and a willingness to learn from them as they express their needs, challenges and aspirations. The innovative thinking and creativity of the global cadre of OY leaders that emerged from GOYN's work have inspired the network to think differently about what opportunities

[2] An Anchor Partner is a local institution, with deep and long-term ties to the local community, that takes on the coordination and facilitation role in the Collaborative, bringing stakeholders together, building a common vision and driving joint activities.

should look like and about what topics, and which stakeholders, need to be part of the global conversation around youth unemployment.

The Youth Partnership Checklist below provides a snapshot of GOYN's approach to working with youth to devise solutions that holistically tackle the problems they face.

THE GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK YOUTH PARTNERSHIP CHECKLIST

- ❑ Use an asset-based lens to lift and amplify young people's voices
- ❑ Compensate young people appropriately for their time and contributions
- ❑ Remove barriers to young people's participation
- ❑ Train adults to act as allies to young people
- ❑ Design outreach efforts that can reach a diversity of youth, including those belonging to marginalized groups
- ❑ Let youth decide how they want to organize themselves
- ❑ Provide youth with learning and capacity-strengthening opportunities
- ❑ Treat youth as experts on their own lives, peer groups and communities
- ❑ Make meaningful investments in young people's ideas
- ❑ Invite youth to participate, shape and lead conversations in their communities and beyond

Table of Contents

Introduction: Youth Engagement as a Pathway to Agency-Building . . . 7

Goyn's Core Youth Engagement Principles and Practices 9

Practice #1:
Valuing and Amplifying Youth Voice 10

Practice #2:
Engaging Opportunity Youth as Partners 13

Practice #3:
Supporting and Mobilizing Opportunity Youth
as Community Leaders 17

Practice #4:
Connecting Opportunity Youth to a Global Platform. 20

Conclusion. 23

INTRODUCTION: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AS A PATHWAY TO AGENCY-BUILDING



CAPTION GOES HERE

GOYN's vision is that Global Opportunity Youth have equitable access to dignified and productive entrepreneurship and employment pathways.

GOYN's mission is to mobilize Opportunity Youth and other community stakeholders to create collaborative, place-based systems shifts that advance equity and increase youth income, assets and agency.

GOYN's approach to youth engagement is centered around youth agency. While GOYN's ultimate goal is to increase access to dignified, productive and sustainable employment and entrepreneurship pathways for "Opportunity Youth" (OY) – youth aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed – GOYN also knows that connecting young people to these economic opportunities is about much more than skills-building, employability training or jobs placement services. Indeed, supporting a young person's well-being and helping them to develop a sense of belonging and purpose through meaningful engagement and action is critical to enable them to build the necessary agency to desire and work towards personal and professional success. It is that sentiment of agency, internalized and acted upon, that propels a young person to lead in their personal and professional

lives, engage in their community, and shift their mindset from one of surviving to one of thriving. By seeing themselves as leaders, young people can start to influence positive changes in the world around them. Meaningful youth engagement also opens up a world of possibilities for adults and adult-led institutions. Youth perspectives and aspirations breathe new life into repeated conversations and inspire new possibilities by shifting the focus from asking "why?" to asking "why not?".

GOYN's approach builds upon decades of work by other youth organizations. In particular, the emergence of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework[1] thirty years ago revolutionized how youth-serving organizations viewed the young people they engaged with, by appreciating youth's lived-experiences as assets, creating caring and nurturing environments, promoting youth agency and ownership of their lives, and creating a sense of hope for young people while tapping into their aspirations and talent. This framework has supported decades of PYD practices by organizations such as GOYN Global Partner YouthBuild, and has been further codified and advanced by global ecosystem initiatives like YouthPower[2]. In the United States in particular, the OY Forum at the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, founded in 2012, has infused the transformational power of PYD into place-based collective impact efforts, inspiring the creation of GOYN in 2018. GOYN's work builds on the principles of the PYD framework in two ways: first, by emphasizing the need for a genuine *partnership* with young people, and second, by focusing on engaging OY (as opposed to all youth), who are often deemed too hard to reach or seen as less valuable contributors, and therefore left behind in youth engagement activities.

[1] In the 1990s, Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment presented the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development: Confidence (a sense of self-worth and mastery; having a sense of self-efficacy and belief in one's capacity to succeed); Character (taking responsibility; a sense of independence and individuality; connection to principles and values); Connection (a sense of safety, structure, and belonging; positive bonds with people and social institutions); Competence (the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work); and Contribution (active participation and leadership in a variety of settings; making a difference). In 2007, Richard Lerner proposed a 6th C - Caring (a sense of sympathy and empathy for others; commitment to social justice).

[2] A USAID-funded program.

GOYN'S CORE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES



Youth Hub in Ramgarh, India.

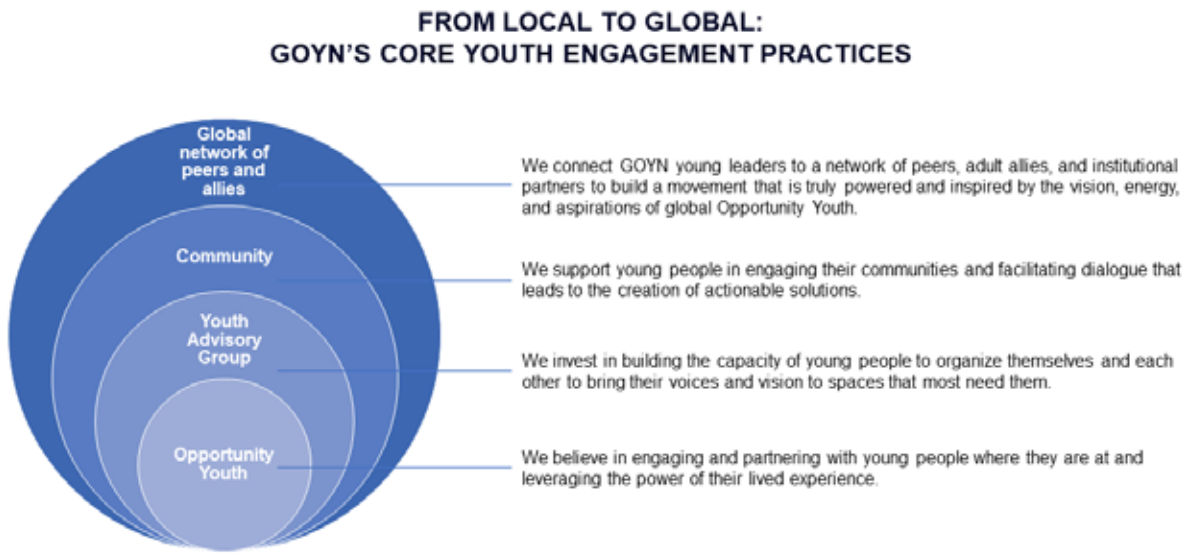
GOYN has four **Core Principles** that promote authentic engagement and partnership with Opportunity Youth:

1. **We center the perspective of young people** in the creation of solutions
2. **We partner with a global network of Opportunity Youth leaders** to share learnings, actions, and innovations
3. **We link young people to resources**, support and allies to **build youth agency**
4. **We promote equity of access and opportunities**

These four principles are outlined by the global community and highlighted below is how they are put into practice in the local context:

1. Valuing and amplifying the voices of Opportunity Youth through meaningful youth engagement
2. Engaging Opportunity Youth as partners in the co-creation and design of solutions to youth unemployment
3. Supporting and mobilizing Opportunity Youth as leaders in their communities
4. Connecting Opportunity Youth to a global platform to share and inspire others

This installment of the Learning Series serves to expand on each of the four Core Practices specified above with each section detailing the rationale to resource and implement the practice, practical examples of how each is applied plus the desired impact the practice has had on the Opportunity Youth involved.



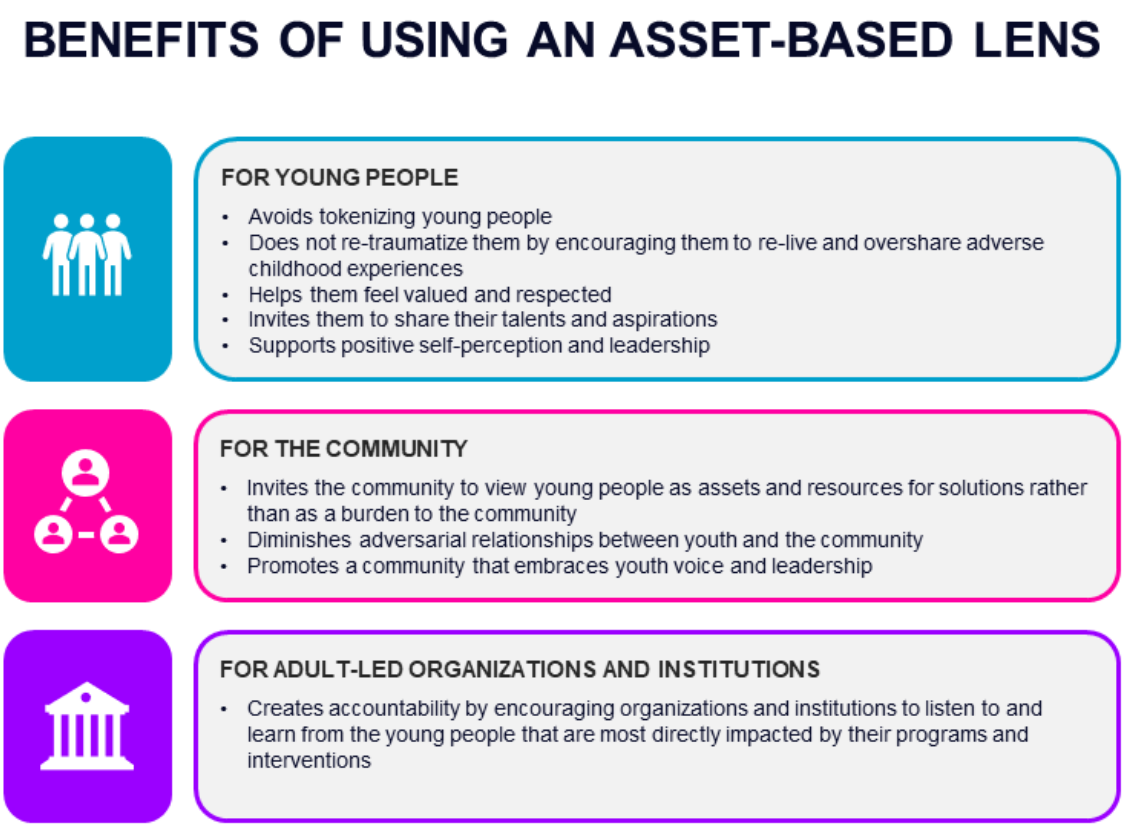
Practice #1: Valuing And Amplifying Youth Voice

An asset-based lens invites young people to share their voice in a way that lifts their talents, lived experiences and aspirations for the future.

This framing creates meaningful and respectful ways for young people to present themselves as victors rather than victims, and to see their experience as an asset rather than a deficiency. It also builds a different image of young people, especially OY, that encourages adults to think about young people in a new way and to engage them from a place of empathy and partnership rather than one of sympathy and charity.



As illustrated in the diagram below, this type of meaningful engagement is beneficial to all stakeholders in the community:



Embracing an asset-based lens requires communicating that youth voice is important, both in theory and in practice.

1. **Lift and amplify young people's narrative without exploiting it:**
   - Invite young people to share from a place of pride and power.
   - Never ask them to share anything you would not want to share about yourself.
   - Communicate to audiences what asset-based storytelling is and discourage tendencies to ask young people to re-live painful experiences, especially in public forums. Leave this to mental health experts who have the training and experience to support the young person in healing from traumatic experiences.

2. **Respect and value young people's time:**
   - Compensate them for their time and involvement. This might be done by providing honoraria, stipends or consulting contracts paying amounts commensurate to the young person's contributions.

- In context where monetary compensation is not feasible or appropriate, consider compensating young people's participation by providing meals during all engagements, supporting technology and connectivity needs, or offering financial support in the form of a personal development fund that young leaders can access to cover costs related to training, education, or other relevant development opportunities.

3. **Remove barriers to participation:**

- Invest in appropriate technology platforms to invite and engage youth voice and participation.
- When convening youth from diverse communities, invest in document translation and language interpretation for in-person and virtual meetings.
- Invest in universal design training[3], especially when sharing ideas with young people of diverse educational levels and learning abilities.
- Cover costs associated with participation, such as transportation costs.

4. **Be an adult ally and partner:**

- Avoid tokenizing[4] the youth experience and young people's stories.
- Invite open communication and embrace discomfort when young people challenge your ideas and invite you to understand where they are coming from.
- Support young people in thinking and growing beyond what you may be able to help them accomplish.
- Avoid ageism and adultism. Respect and listen to young people without minimizing their contributions because they are younger than you or may have less education, traditional experience, or do not communicate and present themselves in ways that align, look, or sound familiar.

An example: Aasiya's story

The second of thirteen children, Aasiya Shaik was born and brought up in one of the most disadvantaged areas of Pune, India. With a great deal of effort, she managed to graduate from high school but lacked the vocational skills to retain a steady job. This is when she heard about the Lighthouse Communities Foundation (LCF), GOYN's Anchor Partner[5] in Pune. Through LCF, Aasiya completed a vocational course and was hired as a youth coordinator shortly after. She went on to become one of



Youth event organized by GOYN Pune, India.

[3] Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an evidence-based framework that supports the development and use of flexible learning environments and spaces to accommodate individuals with different educational backgrounds and needs. For more information, please visit https://udlguidelines.cast.org/.

[4] Tokenism is the practice of including a small number of people from underrepresented groups (in this case Opportunity Youth) to give the appearance of inclusion without actually valuing their views and ideas.

[5] Anchor Partners are the lead local partners responsible for coordinating all GOYN activities in a community, including youth engagement, research and analysis efforts, strategy development, stakeholder convenings, monitoring and evaluation activities and GOYN fundraising.

the founding members of GOYN Pune's Youth Advisory Group, taking a leading role in the setup of GOYN in her community. This engagement propelled her to new heights, including her participation to the 2019 Global Youth Economic Opportunities Summit in the US, where she spoke in front of a large international crowd – a journey she never imagined growing up. Since then, Aasiya has continued to grow her career at LCF and is actively mentoring other young people in her community to help them accomplish their own dreams.

Aasiya's experience is a practical example of the power of GOYN's approach to youth engagement. In all GOYN communities around the world, GOYN is working with young people like Aasiya to ideate, design and implement locally-driven initiatives that remove structural barriers to youth unemployment.

Practice #2: Engaging Opportunity Youth As Partners

Since its inception, GOYN has applied a clear methodology to co-create and design solutions to youth unemployment with Opportunity Youth themselves.

This methodology is centered around the establishment of a structured Youth Advisory Group (YAG), which works closely with the GOYN Anchor 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 interventions, and act as GOYN champions among other youth. There are currently 150 YAG members leading across nine GOYN communities.

What does "engaging Opportunity Youth as partners" mean for GOYN?

OY are engaged through all phases of GOYN's work, not just the beginning or the end

OY perspectives and opinions are **continuously and equally sought and valued**

OY are seen as experts in their lived experiences

OY are given the **tools, training and spaces** to voice their ideas and be heard

OY are **respected and supported** by all stakeholders

The establishment of the YAG starts with an extensive consultative process. When GOYN starts working in a new community, the local GOYN Anchor Partner leads a thorough research process to understand the underlying barriers and drivers of youth unemployment. This includes significant outreach and consultation efforts with OY in the community, for instance through surveys and focus groups, to understand their diversity, aspirations and challenges. During this early engagement, OY are invited to share their experiences, perspectives and visions for what meaningful economic opportunities might look like. Young people are then invited to continue engaging and partner with GOYN as an early group of 10-20 youth advisors who then co-design a local youth engagement strategy. This group then supports the formation and launch of a YAG, and inform the identification and final selection of priority economic pathways for youth in the community.

As an example, in the community of Thiès, Senegal, the GOYN team organized a series of four consultations with a representative group of 50 OY to hear about their lived experiences, better understand the barriers they face when pursuing economic and livelihood opportunities, gather insights on how to best connect with other local OY, and co-design an initial vision and plan for the YAG. This consultative process was designed to ensure that the engaged youth represented the diverse make-up of the local community in terms of gender, religious affiliation, and physical ability. Additionally, given the low levels of academic achievements (most OY in Thiès have not completed primary school education) and diversity of languages spoken (young people speak either Wolof or French, rarely both), the GOYN Thiès team took special care to ensure that meetings and materials were presented in ways that were accessible to all, including using visual materials and having staff fluent in both languages.



Youth consultation organized by GOYN Thiès, Senegal.

THE GOYN YOUTH VOICE AGENDA: MOVING TOWARDS ENGAGING YOUTH AS PARTNERS

Superficial engagement — *Consultation* — *Partnership*

REACT & RESPOND

Youth are presented with an idea or a question and are asked to react or respond. The process is documented, and youth are dismissed until the next time their reaction or response is required or requested.

FEEDBACK & INPUT

Youth are presented with an idea or concept and are asked to opine or share suggestions for how that idea or concept might be modified or implemented.

CO-DESIGN, CO-CREATE, CO-FACILITATE

Youth are invited to be part of a group process that assesses a situation or problem statement, identifies potential solutions, designs practical applications or the implementation of those solutions, and analyzes results to inform the ongoing strategy and design process.

Goal is to support skills, aptitudes, attitudes, and capacity building

GOYN's youth engagement approach aims to move away from superficial engagement with youth to a true partnership where youth co-design solutions alongside adults.

Governance arrangements for the YAG are designed by the youth themselves. Prior to the official launch of the YAG, the abovementioned group of youth advisors participates in a co-design process to draft, agree on, and establish the YAG's terms of reference. This document outlines the functions of the YAG and the roles and responsibilities of YAG members, and includes guidelines for diversity, equity, and inclusive representation of all OY groups in the community (e.g. gender, differently abled, ethnic, religious and/or tribal affiliations, urban and rural populations). For example, the GOYN Mombasa YAG includes young women, differently-abled youth, young people historically marginalized or involved with the law, and representation from all six Mombasa counties.

The selection of YAG members is informed by youth advisors and varies from community to community, for instance:

- **Election:** youth run for a position on the YAG and are elected by their peers
- **Nomination:** youth are nominated by staff or peers at their organization and go through a selection process
- **Application and selection:** youth apply to join and go through a selective process designed and led by youth (e.g. appointments are made by a youth jury based on a set of predetermined selection criteria)

Once the terms of reference and the selection process of the YAG have been set, its members can be recruited. A GOYN YAG has between 10 and 15 members – enough for a diversity of profiles and perspectives, but not too many as to impede consensus and collective action.

GOYN YAGs play a key role in solution design and implementation of interventions. For instance, as COVID-19 brought communities across the globe to a standstill in early 2020, GOYN Pune staff and YAG leaders leapt into action to assess the needs of OY and their families and connect them to much needed resources. GOYN Pune partnered with the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to establish a COVID Relief Hotline where OY were engaged in crisis helpline training and emergency crisis counseling techniques. The initiative responded to calls from over 2,000 families in Pune and connected over 3,500 individuals to emergency food relief provisions.

GOYN's youth partnership approach goes well beyond engaging young people in initial research, solution design, and YAG formation. GOYN follows young people's lead in deciding and communicating to local and global partners how they want to be viewed, talked about, engaged, and respected as critical stakeholders and partners. In Mexico City, OY convened by GOYN asked themselves and each other:

What do the YAG's terms of reference include?

Role and objectives of the YAG

Composition of the YAG (number and profile of members)

Responsibilities of YAG members

Terms of appointment (length of appointment, selection & appointment process, resignation process)

Level of compensation of YAG members

Purpose and schedule of meetings

- What is stigmatization and which stigmatizing terms are used to describe OY?
- What is wrong with those terms and how do they make us feel?
- How do we feel about the term "OY"?
- What are the characteristics of OY?
- What do we feel, think, aspire to? What challenges do we face?
- Am I an OY?



Visual used by GOYN Mexico City to facilitate youth-led discussions on the stigmas attached to OY.

Responses generated by these questions resulted in the creation and adoption of the GOYN Mexico City "Youth Manifesto", which laid down in clear terms OY's aspirations for themselves and their community. The manifesto now serves as a foundational and guiding document that informs GOYN Mexico City's strategy moving forward. This close engagement with OY culminated in the official launch event of GOYN Mexico City, where the GOYN strategy for the community was introduced to the audience by OY themselves in an engaging video.

GOYN MEXICO CITY – YOUTH MANIFESTO

"We believe that **stigmatizing terms** such as **lazy, good for nothing, disinterested, unexperienced,** rebellious, immature, hopeless, vulnerable, at risk, drug addicts, thieves, antisocial, unmotivated, unskilled, **tired, apathetic, and not very proactive,** to name a few, are **psychological violence.**

We are **creative, enthusiastic, innovative, dreamy, persistent, loyal,** dedicated, energetic, responsible, strong, happy, agile, fighters, resourceful, self-taught, practical, positive, empathetic, virtuous, entrepreneurs, resilient. We are incredible, **we are the inspiration, we are the light of the country, we are young people with potential. We are Opportunity Youth.** Knowing that we're called Opportunity Youth, motivates us to undertake, learn, grow. It reminds us that we're not getting stuck, **we're hungry for knowledge, we want to excel.**"

Excerpts from the GOYN Mexico City Youth Manifesto.

Engaging Opportunity Youth as partners – Lessons learned

Reach all OY, where they are. Outreach efforts should be designed to ensure that youth engaged represent diverse groups of OY, including those belonging to most marginalized groups – such as women, young parents, youth with minimal schooling, homeless youth, migrant youth, and youth in conflict with the law.

Ask OY how they want to lead. Embrace the creativity and talent of young people in creating youth leadership structures and assessing community needs to design and implement youth-led engagement and relief efforts.

Ask questions, listen and learn. Be open to hearing from OY about how they want to be talked about, engaged, supported, and connect with them based on their individual assets and leadership styles.

Practice #3: Supporting And Mobilizing Opportunity Youth As Community Leaders

Reaching, engaging, and supporting young people to formulate and implement interventions that address local barriers to youth economic opportunities is central to GOYN's approach. For most of the young people engaged by local GOYN partners, this is the first time they have been invited to share their experiences of structural inequities and to consider collective actions that could address the barriers they face. GOYN provides them with the opportunity to initiate change in their community – along with the training, resources and connections to do so effectively.

Young people come with unique skills and abilities. Giving youth the chance to leverage and sharpen their skills and abilities through knowledge-sharing plus opportunities to put this knowledge to work, strengthens their confidence and increases their impact by building their capacity to mobilize and influence change in their community. This is why capacity strengthening is a critical component of GOYN's approach to youth engagement, with time dedicated to such activities in each YAG meeting.

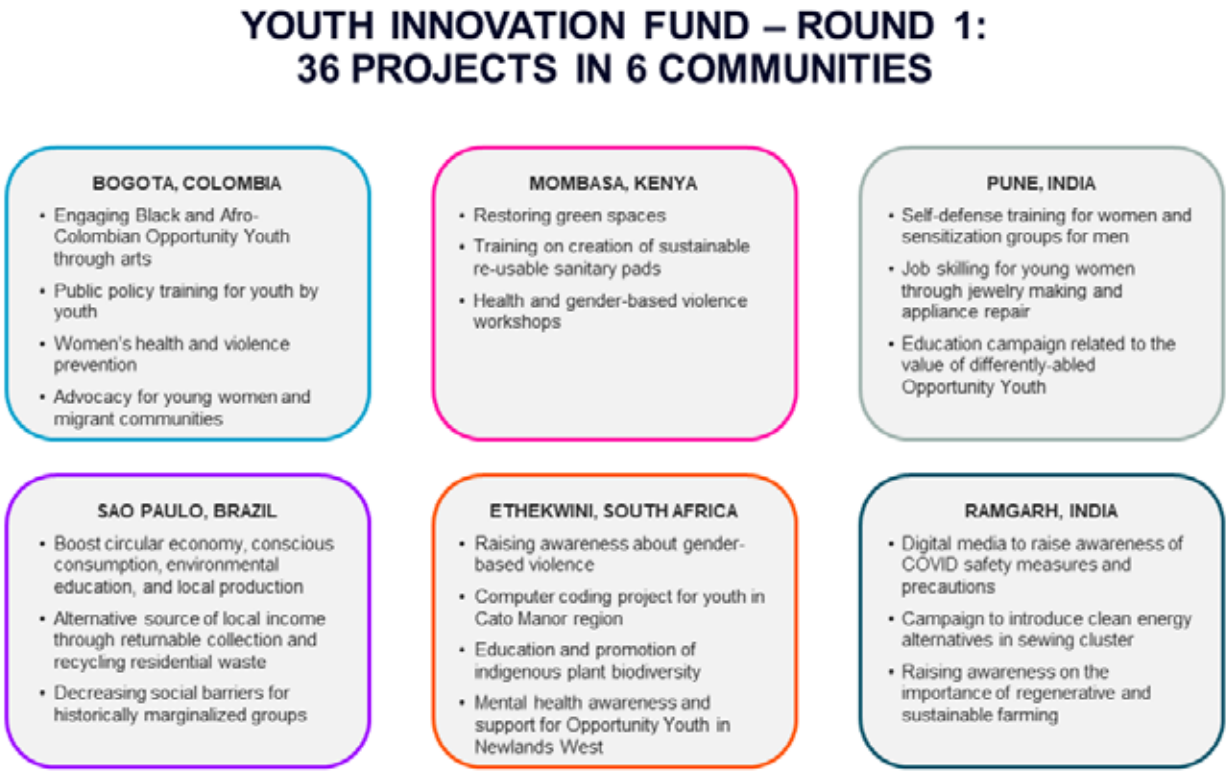

GOYN Mombasa OY after a policy training session.

In Mombasa, GOYN YAG members leveraged a government-led community consultation process and participated in workshops to assess local laws and policies and their impact on young people's access to opportunities. This led them to recommend potential solutions that young people and local partners could start moving forward to create change in the community. This included ideas around shifting perceptions of OY, influencing local hiring practices, redirecting investments to benefit youth, and advocating for changes in government policies related to OY.

This process allowed YAG members to develop research, leadership, and networking skills. It also helped YAG members and GOYN staff better understand the lived realities of other OY in Mombasa, which in turn informed the design of the local GOYN strategy and identified additional training and capacity-building areas for YAG members, such as policy analysis and advocacy strategies.

With the appropriate support, OY can engage and organize themselves and their peers more effectively. In Ramgarh, a rural tribal community in Jharkhand, India, the GOYN Anchor Partner engaged and launched a cohort of Youth Fellows – former OY and university students from all walks of life – to analyze the challenges rural youth face and help create solutions to broaden their access to dignified economic opportunities. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Youth Fellows were mobilized to conduct a door-to-door outreach and discovery process across 16 Ramgarh neighborhoods. They oriented residents to the goals of GOYN and gathered information about the economic and pandemic-related needs of OY and their families. This early youth-led discovery and information-sharing process led to local interest in connecting and supporting GOYN efforts at a time when local connections and collaboration seemed unrealistic and untenable.

Investing in OY helps them grow as leaders in their community. In March 2021, GOYN launched the pilot round of the GOYN Youth Innovation Fund (YIF) to invest in solutions developed by teams of OY to address local challenges related to equity, sustainability, and economic opportunity. A total of 234 teams – representing approximately 500 young people - across six GOYN communities applied. Applications were first shortlisted by local YAGs, with the final selection made by a global team of GOYN partners and youth leaders. Ultimately, 36 Youth Innovation projects were selected, all addressing issues of equity and inclusion. The image below illustrates the diversity of initiatives supported by GOYN.



Najma Parween's project is a powerful example of youth innovation. Najma lives in the rural community of Ramgarh, India, where around 250 families from her village are involved in sewing activities. She noticed that frequent power blackouts were affecting household work and ultimately incomes. With funding from the YIF, Najma took the initiative of popularizing the usage of solar-powered sewing machines and is now training 400 young women to use such machines. She is also working with artisans in local markets to create a client base for the fabrics and garments produced by local families involved in sewing activities.

Building on the success and learnings from this first iteration, the GOYN YIF is now entering its second year, with GOYN Anchor Partners engaging GOYN Collaborative members to support YIF project design efforts and capacity-building of YIF grantees. For example, the GOYN Bogotà team has entered into a formal agreement with LISA, a leadership development provider, to support YIF grantees on project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Through GOYN, OY get to influence the ways of working of the ecosystem they live in. In addition to developing innovative projects, OY leaders in GOYN communities are invited to strengthen their capacity and mobilize others to influence how OY are viewed and invested in.

For instance, in São Paulo, Brazil, YAG members were first invited to participate in Action Learning training with local partners to understand how people learn, how to bridge differences in communication styles, and how to facilitate group discussions. In addition to the training, YAG members have also been engaging in monthly "Youth Café" meetings where they discuss challenges faced by traditionally marginalized youth, including Afro-Brazilian youth and youth living in peripheral communities. The YAG then discussed how to best communicate those challenges to local employers, in preparation of GOYN-led employer engagement and advocacy efforts that will be taking place over the remainder of 2022.

Supporting and mobilizing Opportunity Youth – Lessons learned

Invest in learning and capacity strengthening. OY bring unique perspectives and talents to the table. Make sure to invest in these capabilities and provide them with opportunities to better understand local policies, practices and systems so that they can best advocate and influence positive change in their community.

Engage OY as experts to reach other youth and understand community and youth needs from a unique and trusted perspective. Local OY leaders can reach other OY in ways that organizations and institutions might not, and unlock doors to people and conversations to deepen the understanding of the needs of their communities.

Support youth creativity and innovation. Take deliberate and careful measures to ensure that, as you test local solutions, you are investing in the ideas of OY. They understand the challenges best and are uniquely positioned to co-design and co-implement solutions that will be welcomed by their peers in community.

Another example can be found in eThekwini, South Africa, where GOYN Anchor Partner Harambee created the GESI (Gender Equity and Social Inclusion) framework in response to OY asking for a greater focus on structural barriers to equity and inclusion. The framework and associated program will be applied across all GOYN eThekwini areas of work and will be used to better equip partners and employers in particular, to engage with traditionally marginalized OY groups (e.g. young women, differently-abled youth).

Practice #4: Connecting Opportunity Youth To A Global Platform

One of the unique features of GOYN is its ability to bring OY from different communities, countries and continents together into a global peer-to-peer network. Through GOYN, OY have started a unique dialogue with other young people experiencing the impacts of systemic inequities (such as those related to gender, race, ethnicity or social class, among others). GOYN actively supports this global dialogue by creating spaces for OY to connect and exchange ideas across GOYN communities.

Through their participation in global exchanges, OY have shaped GOYN's youth voice, leadership and partnership approach:

- In 2018, GOYN organized the first *Global OY Conference,* where 25 OY from around the world shared their lived experiences and their visions for communities and a world full of opportunities for those most marginalized. This initial gathering shaped and breathed life into the GOYN Youth Voice Agenda.
- In 2020, at the first *GOYN Global Virtual Convening*, over 600 youth and adult allies joined GOYN OY leaders for four days of virtual workshops that served as a global platform for OY to engage with leaders from global institutions (including Prudential, Botnar Foundation, United Way, Accenture, Making Cents, USAID and CRS, to name just a few) as equals in conversations around the new realities and challenges faced by OY amid the emergence of the COVID19 pandemic.
- In 2021, despite continued challenges resulting from the pandemic, GOYN OY leaders co-designed and facilitated two virtual global conventions – a *Youth Innovations Gathering* highlighting the power and impact of YIF grantees and their projects, and the 2021 *GOYN Youth Equity Summit,* where OY leaders and partners engaged in deep conversations around the need to explore and work at the intersection of economic opportunity, livelihood creation, and structural equity.

In addition to global conventions, GOYN OY leaders are consistently engaged in exchanges with their global peers through monthly virtual meetings where they share updates, discuss challenges, organize global events, and build their own community. These conversations are facilitated via simultaneous interpretation, across multiple languages – English, French, Hindi, Portuguese and Spanish.

These exchanges made it possible for GOYN OY leaders to conceptualize and co-create a series of youth-led dialogues to inform an emerging GOYN Structural Justice and Equity agenda. Through these sessions, GOYN realized that it was necessary to approach youth unemployment through an equity lens and to engage all stakeholders on this approach. This also led GOYN to revise its strategic framework to include equity as a cross-cutting theme across all GOYN focus areas. The GOYN Structural Justice Advisory Group, which includes

representation from all GOYN communities and guides the implementation of its Structural Justice and Equity agenda, highlighted the need to examine and understand structural inequities more rigorously. Using data, research and dialogue, GOYN will be able to articulate how these inequities create barriers to economic opportunities for young people, and take important first steps in identifying policy, advocacy, and employer engagement strategies to address these barriers.

GOYN gives OY a platform to inspire global allies. In September 2019, when the abovementioned GOYN Pune founding YAG member Aasiya attended the Youth Economic Opportunities (YEO) Summit in Washington DC, she shared her experience connecting with OY in her community as part of GOYN, and talked about the power of youth-adult partnerships. It was her first time travelling outside of Pune. She made friends, impacted others, and gained a new sense of confidence. Reflecting her experience, Aasiya said:

> *"For a person like me to have visited the United States seems like a lifetime achievement. Until then, I had no experience of talking in front of such enormous crowds and I was not confident about speaking in English. On the 1st of Oct, 2019, however, I addressed the audience in English. The audience applauded, and this helped me to gain confidence in public speaking. I learned how to speak and present myself in such situations and have been counseling OY about the same since."*



Aasiya (center) amongst OY leaders from Brazil, Pune, Mombasa and Bogotà at the 2019 Global YEO Summit.

GOYN continually offers such opportunities to the young people in its network. Earlier this year, at the 2022 YEO Virtual Summit, GOYN Mombasa YAG member Rajab Salim co-facilitated a deeply moving conversation with adult allies from global youth-serving organizations about the need to center work on equity in order to create economic and livelihood opportunities and to collaborate with youth as partners rather than "participants". Consistently elevating the voices of OY on these global stages is part of GOYN's advocacy strategy to change perceptions of this segment of the youth population and inspire stakeholders to act in support of GOYN's vision.

Connecting Opportunity Youth to a global platform – Lessons learned

Eliminate barriers to dialogue and meaningful exchange of ideas. Talk to OY to understand what barriers they face when connecting to their peers, community, and local and global institutions. For example, invest in translation and interpretation to facilitate dialogue across language groups.

Connect OY to the world. Secure resources to provide them with the devices and connectivity they need to connect with others.

"Share the mic" and bring youth voice, vision, and leadership into global conversations. Invite OY to join adult allies in discussing and identifying the solutions our communities and world need.

Train the adults. Adult allies need to be ready and committed to listening to young people, valuing their perspectives and ensuring they have a seat at the table.

Enter every conversation with OY with an open mind. Prepare to be challenged and embrace what is possible when we commit to supporting young people to create the world they aspire and deserve to live in!

CONCLUSION

By partnering with OY, learning from them, investing in sharpening their innate skills and developing their ideas, we open the world up to the possibility of a new and hopeful reality. Meaningful youth engagement requires time, resources and intentionality. Above all, it requires a mindset shift and a willingness to learn from young people themselves as they express their needs, challenges and aspirations. GOYN and its global community of partners have benefited enormously from embracing a consistent, respectful and authentic youth partnership approach. The innovative thinking and creativity of the global cadre of OY leaders that have emerged from GOYN's work have inspired the network to think differently about what opportunities should look like and about what topics, and which stakeholders, need to be part of the global conversation around youth unemployment. These invaluable insights will continue to drive and shape GOYN's work for years to come.

We encourage you to join us and our OY partners on this journey. As a first step, the ten-point checklist on the following page provides a summary of the core principles and best practices for building meaningful partnerships with young people. We hope you will find it useful, and invite you to reach out for further guidance.

Excited by this work and want to know more about GOYN? Please get in touch with Jamie McAuliffe, Director at GOYN, at Jamie.McAuliffe@aspeninstitute.org.

Future installments of the GOYN 'The Future is Young' Learning Series will continue to explore themes related to youth economic opportunities, sharing lessons learned by GOYN communities to inform and inspire others seeking to make a difference in young people's lives.

THE YOUTH PARTNERSHIP CHECKLIST

- ❑ Use an asset-based lens to lift and amplify young people's voices
- ❑ Compensate young people appropriately for their time and contributions
- ❑ Remove barriers to young people's participation
- ❑ Train adults to act as allies to young people
- ❑ Design outreach efforts that can reach a diversity of young people, including those belonging to marginalized groups
- ❑ Let young people decide how they want to organize themselves
- ❑ Provide young people with learning and capacity-strengthening opportunities
- ❑ Treat young people as experts on their own lives, peer groups and communities
- ❑ Make meaningful investments in young people's ideas
- ❑ Invite young people to participate, shape and lead conversations in their communities and beyond

Above all, ask questions, listen and learn from youth themselves on how they want to engage, lead and grow