

DEVELOPING A YOUTH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM IN SENEGAL

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During this past summer 2016 I had the opportunity to conduct my field practicum as part of the Masters in Sustainable Development Practice (MDP). I traveled to Dakar, Senegal, and during three months worked with the international organization, Ashoka, to develop a youth social entrepreneurship program. Ashoka is known for its global network of 3,000 social entrepreneur fellows, and has been working in the Senegal since 1992. With a hundred fellows now part of its Francophone West African network, Ashoka has sought various ways to reach youth: Africa's largest population. Youth Venture is Ashoka's social entrepreneurship program specifically designed for young people between the ages of 12 to 22. It is an experiential learning process that aims to build appropriate skills such as leadership, empathy, teamwork, and social entrepreneurship among youth to allow them to be changemakers within their communities.

Implemented in East Africa since 2012, the Ashoka Sahel team has lagged behind in this process. As junior consultant, I therefore conducted a needs assessment for the Youth Venture program through four of Ashoka's partner organizations. Two universities, Institut Supérieur de Management and Institut Africain de Management, as well as two high schools, Lycee Prive d'Excellence Birago Diop and the Senegalese-American Bilingual School, were recruited for the study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of the institutions in order to understand how they are currently engaging their students in social initiatives. I also facilitated four focus group discussions with students from each of the institutions in as a means to get a



deeper understanding of Senegalese youth's perspectives on social entrepreneurship as well as what their needs in order to launch social ventures of their own.

Primary results from the study highlighted that there is a need to engage school-aged youth (12-18 years old) in social entrepreneurship as a means to develop youth's potential at an early stage to help address some of Senegal's largest social and or environmental challenges. Another significant finding was that the partner high schools and universities on their own already engage their students in socially related or social entrepreneurship activities. While this is very welcomed, it appears that there is a need for a structured program which provides the appropriate skills accompanied by resources which youth should possess to launch successful social ventures. Shared with stakeholders during two workshops and meetings while still in Dakar, Senegal, findings and analysis from the collected data allowed me to develop detailed recommendations for the Youth Venture program's design and adaptation to the context of Senegal.

As a student, this field work came with its own set of challenges, including adjusting to a new work culture and having access to limited resources. However, the choice to carry out my field practicum in my home country, allowed me to be exposed to the different realities of working in the development sector with the added benefit of spending some quality time with family.

Rugiyatu Kane is a Masters in Sustainable Development Practice student and former FLAS fellow (Swahili, 2014-16). Her field practicum was supported by the Center for African Studies and the MacArthur Foundation.