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SENEGAL VISION 2050: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

By 2050, Senegal will face major transformations: a population explosion, the energy transition, accelerated digitalisation and a reshaping of economic and social balances. Against this backdrop, Senegal Vision 2050 serves as a strategic roadmap for building a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable society.

The country's future rests primarily on two key social forces: young people and women, who together account for more than two-thirds of the population. They represent both a potential for transformation and a risk of vulnerability if their inclusion is not fully ensured. Despite significant progress in education, entrepreneurship and civic participation, structural challenges persist: high youth unemployment, economic insecurity among women, unequal access to opportunities and under-representation in decision-making bodies. With a median age of 19, Senegal is a young country whose dynamism represents both an opportunity and a challenge for sustainable development.

Furthermore, the youth population is not homogeneous: needs and solutions differ across age groups. For example, 15–18-year-olds, 18–30-year-olds, and certain Arabic-speaking youth, face specific challenges. The low rate of employment also drives many young people to switch to sectors far removed from their initial training, highlighting the need to rethink education systems to better integrate knowledge, skills and personal development.

It was against this backdrop that the round table 'Senegal Vision 2050: Unlocking the Potential of Young People for a Sustainable Future', which aimed to contribute to a strategic and inclusive discussion on the central role of young people in achieving Senegal Vision 2050, as well as on the policies, initiatives and partnerships needed to fully unlock their potential in the service of sustainable and equitable development.

The specific objectives of this discussion were to:

- Analyse Senegal's Vision 2050 in terms of youth participation and inclusion;
- Identify the opportunities and challenges associated with their involvement in the country's social, economic and political transformation;
- Propose avenues for reflection and action to ensure that young people play a central role in the implementation of this vision.

Note: QUICKs are short documents produced from WATHI's virtual roundtables. They present the main findings and courses of action and are intended to inform public debate, collective action and policy decisions.

GUEST PANELLISTS

- **Ms Arame Gueye Sène,** Member of the Steering Committee of the Senegal Youth Consortium, Executive Director of Social Change Factory;
- **Mr Alassane Diallo,** Director General for Youth at the Ministry of Youth and Sport;
- **Mr Papa Massamba Ndiaye,** Executive Director of the National Youth Digital Debate;
- **Ms Saran Kaba Wagué,** Entrepreneur and Strategist in Communications and Public Affairs.

KEY FINDINGS

Senegalese youth account for over 75% of the population, with a median age of 19. This human capital represents a major strategic asset for the country, not only as potential for the future, but also as an active force today. Young people can become a driving force for development if supported by appropriate policies and mechanisms.

Each year, 200,000 to 300,000 young people enter the labour market, but the economy struggles to absorb them. Thirty-four per cent of young people are neither in employment, education, nor training (NEET), a figure that is even higher among young women. The majority of young people work in the informal sector, without social protection, health insurance, income security, or retirement prospects, which undermines their economic integration and limits their ability to build stable life plans.

Although numerous funding programmes exist (General Delegation for Rapid Women's Entrepreneurship (DER), Fund for Vocational and Technical Training (3FPT), Priority Investment Guarantee Fund (FONGIP), Community Agricultural Areas Programme (PRODAC), etc.), their dissemination is insufficient, poorly centralised, and often slow. Young people must seek out information on their own, which puts those without a network at a disadvantage, especially outside of Dakar. Funding programmes for Very Small Enterprises (VSEs) and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly those led by women, remain limited and difficult to access, with high interest rates that hinder entrepreneurship.

Young women's access to agriculture is limited by difficulties in accessing land and the scarcity of arable land. Faced with these constraints, many women turn to creative and multidisciplinary sectors (fashion, design, beauty, cosmetics), but the majority work in the informal sector, which limits their income and opportunities. Women's entrepreneurship, however, has a strong socioeconomic impact and provides a path to self-reliance for young women.

Training, employment, and funding opportunities are concentrated in Dakar, marginalising young people in rural or outlying areas such as Kolda, Ziguinchor, Kédougou, and Tambacounda.

Young people's representation in decision-making bodies remains limited, and intergenerational dialogue is insufficient. Governance issues within certain youth associations are slowing down reforms and hindering the inclusion of newcomers.

Young people show a strong interest in innovative and emerging professions, including the agricultural, forestry and pastoral sectors, technology, digital technology and the creative industries. However, their development is hampered by difficult access to finance, a lack of blended learning programmes, and poor coordination between public bodies, incubators and banks.

A section of Senegal's youth, often from religious or Arabic-specialised educational backgrounds, faces specific challenges compared to other young people, particularly regarding entry into the labour market and recognition of their skills in the labour market.

Numerous programmes exist, but monitoring of these is limited and their implementation lacks transparency and rigour. Young people must be empowered and involved in the management of funds and initiatives, with clear evaluation mechanisms to ensure impact, equitable access to opportunities and the sustainability of projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adapt fiscal and administrative policies to encourage the formalisation of young entrepreneurs, with tax rates tailored to their size and a reduction in discouraging administrative burdens.

- Accelerate access to finance for young people by establishing one-stop shops for rapid disbursement (maximum 15 days), based on the feasibility, performance and transparency of projects, without requiring unrealistic collateral.

- Encourage and support young women to develop businesses in creative entrepreneurial sectors such as fashion, design, or the cosmetics and make-up industries, particularly in contexts where access to land or physical resources remains limited.

- Make vocational training more accessible by creating regional or local mini-campuses that integrate technical, management and digital training, to harness human potential outside Dakar and strengthen regional inclusion.

- Set up mentoring and post-training support programmes, combining short courses, work placements, work-study schemes, individual support and guidance from experienced entrepreneurs, to facilitate entry into the labour market and skills development, in partnership with the private sector.

- Establish a national support system for young graduates combining targeted vocational training and direct placement in companies, inspired by proven foreign models (such as the French system of the National Employment Agency (ANPE)), to facilitate their access to employment and harness their potential, whilst creating a structured partnership between the State, businesses and young people for the sustainable development of Senegal's human capital.

- Integrate Arabic-language curricula with vocational training by introducing practical modules and certifications linked to emerging professions, entrepreneurship and the technical skills required by the labour market.

- Promote existing entrepreneurs as role models and mentors, by highlighting local success stories both female and male to inspire young people and shift the narrative around achieving success without an inheritance or initial capital.

- Strengthen partnerships with the private sector and local authorities by facilitating access to land, resources and tax exemptions for young entrepreneurs and productive associations.

- Adapt training programmes and curricula in universities and training centres to market needs, by exploring productive and emerging sectors, and by strengthening the link between training and employment to improve young people's integration into the labour market.

- Create an African corporate social responsibility (CSR) network to support and fund social entrepreneurship, by facilitating civil society organisations' (CSOs) access to funding from philanthropists, cooperation agencies and NGOs, in order to strengthen an inclusive Senegalese ecosystem suited to social initiatives aimed at young people.

- Develop the social and solidarity economy by supporting local associations and initiatives such as economic actors and job creators, with a stable legislative and regulatory framework that guarantees their autonomy and long-term viability.

- Strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and transparency of youth policies by establishing clear performance indicators and monitoring committees that include youth representatives, in order to adjust actions and ensure the effectiveness of programmes.

- Create digital platforms to map young people's initiatives and skills, by identifying projects, associations and initiatives to facilitate connections with mentors, funding and professional opportunities.

- Prepare for renewal and succession by empowering young people at all levels, involving young people in the co-creation of Vision Senegal 2050 and ensuring strategic continuity through long-term plans (up to 2060). The State must regulate whilst promoting co-creation with young people to ensure equitable access to opportunities.

QUOTES FROM PANELISTS

"Many young people have enormous potential, but the support needed to harness it and put it to use for the benefit of society is not in place. Youth is the present, not just the future." **Ms Arame Gueye Sène, Member of the Steering Committee of the Senegal Youth Consortium, Executive Director of Social Change Factory**

"The labour market struggles to absorb 200,000 to 300,000 new entrants each year, and 34% of young people are neither in employment, education nor training. Institutional communication must do a better job of bringing opportunities to young people across the country." **Ms Arame Gueye Sène, Member of the Steering Committee of the Senegal Youth Consortium, Executive Director of Social Change Factory**

"Any public policy that fails to take young people into account is naturally doomed to failure. Vision 2050 places human capital and innovation at the heart of our priorities to enable young people to quickly find their place at the top." **Mr Alassane Diallo, Director General for Youth at the Ministry of Youth and Sport**

"Our young people are very well trained, but there is a mismatch between training and the labour market, particularly in terms of digital skills and the green economy. We need to develop work-based learning and internship schemes." **Mr Alassane Diallo, Director General for Youth at the Ministry of Youth and Sport**

"Digital platforms offer young people a unique space to express themselves and influence public policy, but access remains unequal. The digital divide remains a major obstacle to inclusion and civic participation." **Mr Papa Massamba Ndiaye, Executive Director of the National Youth Digital Debate**

"We must empower young people through programmes that give them the tools to transform their digital engagement into concrete action on the ground." **Mr Papa Massamba Ndiaye, Executive Director of the National Youth Digital Debate**

"What interests us is how the system, working with youth organisations, can really drive forward youth inclusion. [...] Inclusion starts with design, continues through implementation, and extends to evaluation; it is a whole process where we are present and have the capacity to shape the debate." **Mr Papa Massamba Ndiaye, Executive Director of the National Youth Digital Debate**

"Access to finance remains extremely limited: fewer than 20% of small and medium-sized enterprises run by women obtain bank loans." **Ms Saran Kaba Wagué, Entrepreneur and Communications and Public Affairs Strategist**

"The slowness of funding processes and the lack of communication force young people to reinvent their business plans for each programme. Equal access to opportunities across the country remains a major challenge." **Ms Saran Kaba Wagué, Entrepreneur and Communications and Public Affairs Strategist**

"Today, nearly 80% of workers in my sector are women, often with very little formal training. This has a direct impact on reducing female unemployment from an economic perspective." **Ms Saran Kaba Wagué, Entrepreneur and Communications and Public Affairs Strategist**

QUOTES FROM THE AUDIENCE

"The public sphere has become dangerous, and people are turning to community organisations. If we fail to enable them to formalise their status, we are perpetuating a denial of democracy. Going to the sub-prefecture, the prefecture, undergoing background checks... the whole process is extremely lengthy and greatly discourages many young people who have plans for this country. It is essential to allow youth associations to exist and develop in an autonomous and sustainable manner." **Mohamed Rassoul NDIAYE, Programme Coordinator at the DÉMOS Association**

"Looking at the Senegalese labour market, we realise that very often, for tax reasons, some young people remain on internships for years, but end up with contracts as service providers that offer them neither social security, health insurance nor a pension. Today, it is too expensive to hire someone on a fixed-term or permanent contract, so we prefer to pay a 5% BRS rather than pay taxes. The problem needs to be reviewed not only at its roots, but also in its overall structure." **Alioune S. GUINDO, Communications Manager at Bantare Impact Group**

"The government must support young people from start to finish: from vocational training to integration into the workplace. Many young graduates apply everywhere without receiving a response. We need a system similar to France's, with a one-year follow-up to identify their skills, guide them and place them in work placements or temporary roles with a view to securing permanent employment. These young people are ambitious and ready to contribute, but they need structures that genuinely support them." **Mariama Dieng, Deputy for the Senegalese Diaspora in the National Assembly.**

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