



POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN MALI:

**BETTER EDUCATED, ECONOMICALLY
PRODUCTIVE AND CIVICALLY ENGAGED
RURAL YOUTH**



Introduction

Before enrolling in the USAID Mali Out-of-School Youth Project (OSYP), Kany Keita had limited prospects for the future. Like most rural Malian women, she had never been to school and spent most of her time engaged in domestic chores and work on the family farm. She had no independent source of income. But as an OSYP participant, she learned to read, write, and do basic math. She also received technical training in market gardening, along with a starter kit of improved seeds and essential equipment to start her own business. Today, two years after completing her training, Kany continues to manage and expand her business, which now has a monthly income of about \$100USD.

Kany's story is just one of thousands of similar stories from the 10,951 rural youth who completed the youth development cycle in OSYP (also known in Mali as PAJE-Nieta) between 2010 and 2015. The project was led by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), in collaboration with implementing partners Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Swisscontact, Association Jeunesse Action (AJA), and for the Timbuktu region,

Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (AMSS). OSYP worked closely with the Ministry of Employment, Professional Training, Youth and Citizenship during the project.

The primary goal of the OSYP was to enable rural youth between the ages of 14 and 25 who had never been to school or who had dropped out in the early grades to become more educated, economically productive, and civically engaged, and thus also empowered to improve their lives and those of their families and communities. The project was jointly financed by the Education, Economic Growth, and Democracy and Governance Teams of USAID-Mali.

In 2010, EDC conducted a youth assessment to determine the needs and aspirations of rural youth. One major finding was that youth would prefer to live in their home village if they could earn a living there. Based on the results of this assessment and consultations with key stakeholders, including multiple ministries, OSYP developed an integrated holistic model of the youth development cycle to be used in the project.



Three cohorts of youth completed this cycle and with each new cohort, the model was adjusted based on evaluation data, difficulties encountered, and lessons learned.

Mali Out of School Youth Project Holistic Integrated Model

Basic education courses

Literacy in Bamanankan or Songhay, basic numeracy, oral and written functional French

Entrepreneurship courses

Rudimentary microenterprise management concepts, tools, and skills

mLearning

Reinforcement lessons on basic education and entrepreneurship course content loaded on a cell phone

Technical training in an income generating activity (IGA)

Formal sessions ranging from 8 days to 3 months with 3 to 4 individual post-training visits by trainer

IGA starter kit

Basic equipment and materials needed to launch an IGA

Savings and internal lending communities

Voluntary groups that learned the principles and practices of lending and saving

Accompaniment

Support and reinforcement from volunteers, field agents, and technical trainers

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Youth Corps Volunteers

Unemployed graduates who lived in project villages throughout the cycle and were frontline implementers of project activities

Proximity Technical Training

Delivered by qualified local technical trainers who traveled to the villages to train youth

Village Youth Associations

Vector for civic engagement and ongoing implementation support

Key Accomplishments

The project's achievements are evidenced in the stories of young Malians like Kany, whose livelihood opportunities have improved as a result of OSEP. Today, they are:

Better Educated

7,408 youth or 77% exhibited improved reading skills, as measured by EDC's Out of School Literacy Assessment. Completion rates increased with each cohort:

➤ Cohort 1: 33%, Cohort 2: 45%, Cohort 3: 59%

Economically Productive

- 10,951 youth completed technical training. Completion rates improved with each cohort:
 - Cohort 1: 55%, Cohort 2: 79%, Cohort 3: 87%
- 8,077 youth launched a microenterprise as self employed.
- 82% of trained youth who received kits were still self employed up to 24 months after the close of the youth development cycle.
- 70% of youth who launched microenterprises between 2011 and 2013 were still operating their businesses as of November 2015.
- 481 SILC groups were established with 9,534 members, over the life of the project.

Civically Engaged

- 3,863 youth participated in design of 228 community service projects.
- 4,906 youth in Cohort 3 were trained in conflict mitigation and creating a culture of peace and citizenship.

Project Highlights

Mali Out-of-School Youth Project Volunteers

While out-of-school youth were the project's primary target population, EDC also sought to provide young educated Malians with an opportunity to acquire relevant job skills as community development agents by serving as volunteers. Volunteers benefited from an intensive initial 3-week long training that was followed by in-service trainings throughout the development cycle.

During the 19-month service term, youth volunteers (unemployed university graduates or graduates of professional schools) acted as the project's frontline implementers, living in project villages, dispensing courses, accompanying the youth as they launched microenterprises, and engaging in community activities. These volunteers were a strategic component of the program to ensure that the project was connecting with youth at the local level and that interventions remained grounded in their interests and needs. OSYF deployed 303 graduates to serve as youth volunteers, 77 of whom were women.

In addition to volunteer experience, youth volunteers received a monthly stipend and training in information technology (IT), job preparation (resume writing interviewing etc.) and entrepreneurship (starting and managing a business) to make them more competitive in the marketplace. To determine the impact of their service on their own lives, the project conducted a follow-up study of volunteers. Training on how to find a job was particularly sought after by the volunteers, of which 96% stated that they benefited from such training. Of the volunteers surveyed, 29% indicated they had already found a job; among these, 60% were working as community development agents and the rest working in a variety of sectors. Of those surveyed, 96% said they would recommend serving as an OSYF volunteer to a friend, given the skills and experience it afforded them.

Successful Launch of Rural Microenterprises

OSYP was particularly successful in training and coaching youth in entrepreneurship and business startups. Prior to project implementation in the respective regions, a market opportunities study was conducted. These studies served as the basis for validating the income generating activities selected by the rural youth. Most employment opportunities were in the informal agricultural sector or in small service or artisanal industries.

Over the life of the project, 82% of youth who completed technical training and received an IGA starter kit were self-employed. Women outperformed men—87% of women were self-employed compared to 75% of men. This highlights that the project was successful in empowering women, giving them a chance to develop their capacities and acquire skills to improve their lives and those of their children.

Moreover, rates of microenterprise startups increased over the life of the project. The rates were the result of careful activity monitoring, reflection, and adjustment of project support techniques and strategies:

➤ Cohort 1: 60%, Cohort 2: 76%, Cohort 3: 90%

Of special note, as of September 2015, 70% of youth in Cohorts 1 and 2 were still operating their microenterprises, with 64% of these as self-employed, even 24 months after the close of Cohort 1's development cycle (and 12 months after the close of Cohort 2's development cycle). Between 83% (Cohort 1) and 85% (Cohort 2) of youth still in operation reported an increase in profits.

A total of 9,534 youth (including 5,802 women) across all three cohorts participated in the savings and internal lending community (SILC) groups created by OSYF. The average size of the loans across the three cohorts was \$14, a relatively small sum but one that often made the difference in a youth's ability to launch or develop





his or her microenterprise. Over 65% of the loans across cohorts were taken out by women.

Countering Violence Extremism

The coup d'état in Mali in March 2012 paved the way for a rebel takeover of the north by insurgent and jihadist groups. Although the Government of Mali, with the assistance of France and other outside military forces, was able to restore control of the region in February 2013, much of the infrastructure in the region was destroyed and the economy of the region was severely weakened.

OSYP had just begun to work in the Timbuktu region when the coup occurred, and in November 2013, the project was able to return to the region, recruiting a cohort of 1,200 youth, including youth in five sites in Timbuktu town. With the expansion of the project into the Timbuktu region in 2014, funded by USAID's Democracy and Governance team, the project developed training modules on *conflict-mitigation* and *creating a culture of peace and citizenship*.

Although the goal of the project was not centered on countering violent extremism, OSYP provided youth in the region with access to educational, economic, and community engagement opportunities. It is widely recognized that poverty, a lack of economic opportunities, low levels of education, and a sense of alienation and marginalization among youth are all factors that make them potential and often easy targets for recruitment by jihadist groups.

In April 2015, an external group assessed the impact that the project was having on youth as part of a multi-country study evaluating the U.S. Government's development programming in diminishing risks related to violent extremism. The study confirmed that OSYP had a positive impact on countering violent extremism. Though the study took place before the youth had completed the full cycle of inputs and activities, the researchers noted: **“Survey evidence points strongly to increased economic confidence of and opportunities for participants, leading to reduced vulnerability to radical narratives and the lure of extremist recruitment.”** Overall they found OSYP youth to be optimistic about their future, pleased with the training and inputs they had received, and confident that they would be able to improve their economic condition.

Another aspect that the study found successful was the increased commitment of OSYP youth to serve their communities or city-sector. In particular, researchers noted the activities of the Youth Association Coordinating Committees. The study observed: **“The success of the Out-of-School Youth project in strengthening youth associations and in involving youth in civic engagement to serve their communities suggests that the more local youth have an economic and social stake in their communities, the less appeal armed groups and violent extremism may hold for them.”**



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