

SKILLS FOR A
CHANGING WORLD

LIFE SKILLS

November 2017

Translating Competencies to Empowered Action

A Framework for Linking Girls' Life Skills
Education to Social Change

Christina Kwauk and Amanda Braga

Christina Kwauk is a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings

Amanda Braga is a research analyst at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings

Skills for a Changing World is a project of the Center for Universal Education at Brookings and the LEGO Foundation that seeks to ensure all children have high-quality learning opportunities that build the breadth of skills needed to create a productive, healthy society in the face of changing social, technological, and economic demands.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Kendra Dupuy, research colleague at the Chr. Michelsen Institute, for an earlier collaboration on a literature review of girls' life skills education that sparked the ideas behind the framework developed in this paper. The authors would also like to thank Kendra Dupuy, Helyn Kim, Joyce Kinyanjui, Erin Murphy-Graham, Mary Otieno, Suman Sachdeva, Urvashi Sahni, and Dana Schmidt for their invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. This paper also benefited from the critical insights of those attending the workshop, Research gaps and opportunities in girls' life skills education, in support of Girls CHARGE on April 6, 2017. Alex Cheatham contributed valuable research assistance.

The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit organization devoted to independent research and policy solutions. Its mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations for policymakers and the public. The conclusions and recommendations of any Brookings publication are solely those of its author(s), and do not reflect the views of the Institution, its management, or its other scholars.

Brookings gratefully acknowledges the program support provided to the Center for Universal Education by the Government of Norway and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Brookings recognizes that the value it provides is in its absolute commitment to quality, independence, and impact. Activities supported by its donors reflect this commitment.

Access a digital version and a related animation at: <http://brook.gs/2z7Q7d5>



Contents

Overview.....	4
Introduction.....	4
Shortcomings in girls' life skills programming.....	6
Key components and principles to a gender-transformative approach to girls' life skills education.....	8
Implications and next steps.....	20
Conclusions.....	22
References.....	26
Appendix 1: A Sample of Conceptualizations of Life Skills by Organizations Implementing Girls' Life Skills Programming.....	28

Figures

Figure 1: Reconceptualizing life skills as competencies (KSA networks).....	5
Figure 2: Key components for gender-transformative life skills programming.....	8
Figure 3: Life skills development as strengthening KSA networks and building competencies.....	11
Figure 4: Translating competencies to empowered action.....	12
Figure 5: Mediating the successful translation of competencies to empowered action.....	15
Figure 6: Context as multi-layered environments.....	18
Figure 7: Context as multidimensional.....	19

Boxes

Box 1: The dynamic system behind life skills development.....	13
Box 2: Three additional ways to bring context into play.....	18
Box 3: Four core principles for gender-transformative life skills programming.....	24

Overview

This paper draws from evidence of the psychology of learning and theories of gender empowerment to present a framework for girls' life skills education that links life skills development to wider social change for marginalized girls. The paper offers guidance to program designers and implementers, policymakers, and other girls' education actors delivering girls' life skills education programming around the world. The paper first outlines shortcomings in current approaches to girls' life skills education and then presents the key components and principles of a gender-transformative approach to girls' life skills education—an approach that goes beyond a focus on individual self-improvement toward a focus on transforming the structures and relations of power perpetuating gender inequality. The paper redefines life skills as a broader set of competencies comprised of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that strengthen over time, across contexts, and through practice and critical reflection. The paper also discusses the important process of translating such competencies into empowered action, and identifies two important mediating factors (opportunity structures and agency) that ultimately influence the outcomes of this process of translation.

Introduction

Life skills education for marginalized and vulnerable girls around the world is common parlance in the field of girls' education and in efforts focused on empowering adolescent girls. Research demonstrates that skills like critical thinking, perseverance, and decision-making can be important for improving adolescent girls' education, health, and livelihood outcomes at a time when puberty and the transition to womanhood means an ever-shrinking world defined by strict gender norms, practices, expectations, and opportuni-

ties.¹ While there is a consensus on the importance of life skills education, there is less consensus on how to design, deliver, and measure effective and empowering life skills education.

At the heart of this conundrum is a lack of attention to social change. Specifically, practitioners often overlook the dynamic and social processes through which life skills development in the individual girl can actually help girls to transform their life outcomes and circumstances. Underlying this gap are three foundational questions: What is the process through which life skills development translates into *empowered* action—not just action that falls within or perpetuates the status quo, but action that enables them to pursue choices previously denied to them? What are the mediating factors that facilitate this process of translation? And when in a girl's life course should programs aim to target life skills development?

These questions have remained unanswered largely due to a lack of clarity around what we mean when we talk about life skills.² A recent review of the literature shows that there are as many definitions of life skills as there are life skills programs (see Appendix 1 for a sample of how girls' education-focused organizations define life skills).³ Heavy hitters like U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have developed frameworks and provided lists of the specific skills or categories of skills that should be prioritized. These frameworks and lists provide some answers to the question of what life skills are needed.⁴ While some such actors view life skills as a range of protective cognitive, economic, social, and developmental

1 Amin et al, 2016; Cadena et al, 2015.

2 Boler and Aggleton, 2005.

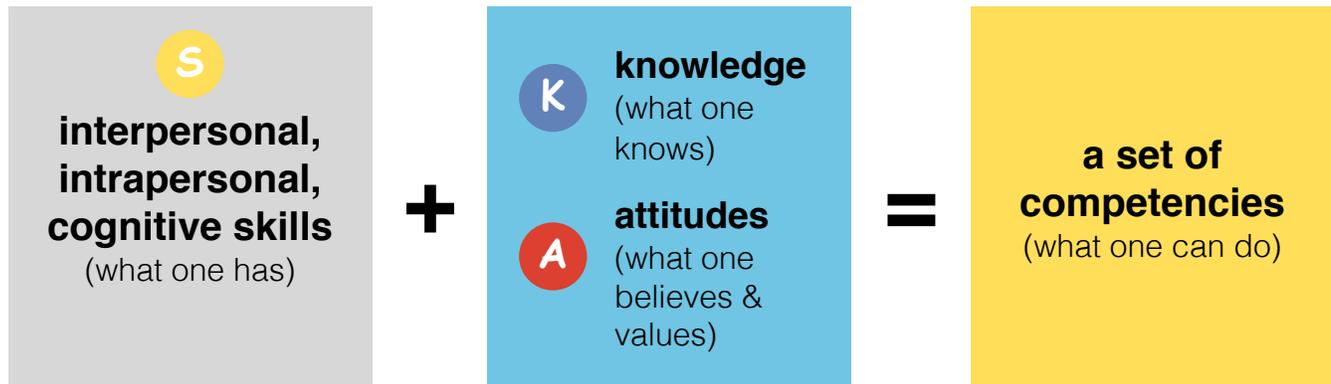
3 Dupuy and Halvorsen, 2016.

4 UNICEF, 2012; UNESCO, 2012; World Health Organization, 1999; OECD, 2016.



Figure 1

Reconceptualizing life skills as competencies (KSA networks)



assets,⁵ others have defined them as key sets of information upon which girls may develop the awareness necessary to change their life outcomes. Building on these definitions, we define life skills as the mix of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive skills (what one has), coupled with knowledge (what one knows) and attitudes (what one believes and values), that constitutes a set of competencies (what one can do) that enable youth to function, thrive, and adapt in their lived realities.

However, the key to moving this work forward is progressing beyond a terminology debate. There needs to be a discussion on the key components and underlying principles of social change for which life skills implementers and policymakers must design. Identifying such core components and principles will enable girls' life skills practitioners to achieve sustainable transformative outcomes for girls—whatever the definition of life skills or the skills deemed necessary for life. This paper attempts to spark such a discussion by applying evidence, theories, and practice from neuroscience, developmental psychology, and gender empowerment to reconceptualize girls' life skills education as a process of transformative learning. It

proposes a framework that focuses on building the competencies that enable girls (and boys) to not only adapt to and deal with the realities of their gender-unequal environments, but to overcome and transform the obstacles they face in living a successful and meaningful life as equal human beings. In short, we bring science and gender perspectives to the skills discussion to offer a more comprehensive approach to thinking about both the *whats* and *hows* of life skills.

Since each life skills implementer operates in a unique context and within distinct program objectives, this paper does not attempt to prescribe an implementation pathway. Rather, it aims to provide life skills implementers with a common framework from which to design holistic life skills programming that purposefully links life skills development to transformational action and social change for girls that is contextually relevant. And while our work is focused on girls, the key components and underlying principles discussed are applicable to life skills programming targeting boys specifically, or marginalized youth in general.

In the sections to follow, we provide an overview of the trends and gaps in girls' life skills programming before introducing the key components and underlying principles to a transformative approach to girls' life skills

⁵ Population Council, 2016; Scales et al., 2013; The Search Institute, 2007; USAID, 2012.

education. These components include life skills—conceptualized as knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs)—as well as factors like opportunity structures and agency that mediate the translation of competencies—conceptualized as networks of KSAs—into empowered action. The paper also emphasizes the continuous, dynamic, and non-linear nature of life skills development, and the interdependent relationship between the individual and her context in determining the possibilities for change in her life outcomes.

Shortcomings in girls' life skills programming

Life skills education is fundamentally about learning and building a breadth of competencies. However, programs are not always delivered by, or in collaboration with, the broader education community—if not at least considering theories of learning and youth development. Indeed, many of the life skills programming implementers come from the health, workforce development, and broader gender and empowerment sectors. Such siloing can lead to missing the mark when it comes to successfully developing life skills and achieving the positive life outcomes deemed important by each sector of practitioners. Nonetheless, common shortcomings across disparate girls' life skills programming are 1) a narrow focus on skills, and 2) a lack of attention to social change.

A narrow focus on skills

When it comes to girls' life skills programming, practitioners have often limited their scope to sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, or economic empowerment. The skills, too, become limited to the usual suspects of communication, negotiation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. However, while practitioners may aim to develop such skills, much of their programming provides technical knowledge and does little to enable the girl to act on that knowledge when

she leaves the safe space that the program may have provided. In addition, the narrow focus on building skills precludes much-needed attention to the underlying gender dynamics and relations of power creating the need for life skills education in the first place. For example, many life skills-based sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs offer practical knowledge on safe sex or disease prevention, but may not account for the strategic knowledge and skills that will help the girl apply what she has learned.⁶ Indeed, she may fully understand the information about safe sex, abstinence, or the consequences of early pregnancy, but lack the negotiation skills to access family planning services or to convince a sexual partner to use contraception.

Perhaps a byproduct of word choice—"life skills," by nature, stresses skills—many life skills practitioners are not making the critical distinction between—nor giving equal attention to—the KSAs that together help youth function, thrive, and adapt to life's challenges and opportunities.⁷ That is, it is not the acquisition of tools alone, or of emancipatory knowledge alone, that enables a girl to make choices previously denied to her—the vision to which most programs are currently designed and delivered. Rather, it is her capacity to draw those tools together with both practical and strategic gender knowledge, supported by empowering beliefs and values, that enables her to understand and act upon her world in a transformative way—the vision to which life skills programming should be designed and delivered.⁸

A narrow focus on skills, together with conflating knowledge as skills, can lead to problems in program, curriculum, and policy design, implementation, and

6 Haberland, 2015; For more on the distinction between practical and strategic gender needs, see Moser, Caroline (1989). *Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs*. *World Development* 17, no. 11: 1799-1825.

7 OECD, 2016; See also Binkley et al. 2012 for further elaboration on what they call the KSAVE (knowledge, skills, and attitudes, values, and ethics) model.

8 Kabeer, 1999; Stromquist, 2015.



assessment. In particular: misaligned interventions and outcomes; misidentified target skills; overlooked building block skills and/or strategic knowledge; ineffective pedagogy or program delivery; problems with measurement; and overstated claims about an intervention or the importance of specific skills. While this paper does not attempt to replace the term life skills, it does propose to expand its scope to include knowledge and attitudes as equal and complementary to—but distinct from—skills. This expanded scope is necessary for understanding not only the learning process and *what* girls learn from life skills programs, but also the pathways from developing life skills to applying life skills.

Little attention to transformative social change for girls

Life skills literature suggests that there is a wide range of social, academic, and health domains in which life skills programs have demonstrated impact: from reducing child marriage to changing views on gender; from economic empowerment to increased leadership; from improved literacy to improved school completion rates; from reduced risky sexual behavior to reduced risk for substance abuse.⁹ Most of this literature is focused on whether life skills education leads to positive behavioral development, to mindset change within the individual girl, or to improved life outcomes for the girl within an existing system. However, much of this literature does not attend to whether and how life skills education leads to *transformative* change between the individual girl and her social, political, and economic environment. It also does not address whether or how such change for a girl might combine into broader collective action that transforms existing social norms, behaviors, and power relations

that have systematically placed girls and women at a disadvantage.¹⁰

This lack of attention to wider social change is troubling since the rationale for many girls' life skills practitioners is to combat the effects of gender discrimination and to empower girls and women to change their circumstances. Missing in many of their approaches, however, is a "gender-transformative" lens—one that goes beyond a focus on individual self-improvement toward a focus on transforming structures and relations of power. These include internalized beliefs, identities, and behaviors, as well as institutionalized policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate gender inequality in society.¹¹ Closely tied to this is the absence of programming that takes into account the mediating factors through, against, and alongside which the girl must translate her life skills into empowered action. Key among these mediating factors are *opportunity structures* like policies, institutions, and networks that limit or enable a wider scope of possible action,¹² and the degree of *agency*—her ability to see and make choices and to exert control over her own life—achieved by the girl at the time of action.¹³ Both factors are discussed in further detail below.

While the concepts of agency and opportunity structures may be abstract, they are important components to incorporate into programs that seek to foster empowered action through life skills development. Without these, and a gender-transformative lens, it is easy for programs to focus on the self-improvement of the girl and to operate within a limited time scope of before and after her participation in the program. It is also easy for programs to overlook the powerful influence of mediating factors that she will encounter outside of the program in her environment and in her

9 Botvin and Griffin 2004; Yankey and Biswas 2012; Maganani et al 2005; Svanemyr et al 2015; Yuen et al 2015]; For a review of the broader literature linking life skills development to specific life outcomes, see Dupuy, Kendra and Halvorsen, Sandra. "Life Skills, Girls, and Non-Formal Contexts in Developing Countries: A Global Literature Review," Unpublished draft manuscript, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2016.

10 Stromquist 2015.

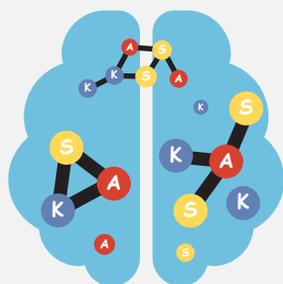
11 Hillenbrand et al., 2015.

12 Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005; Meyer, 2015; Destrooper and Parmentier, 2017; Stromquist, 2015; van Eerdewijk et al., 2017.

13 Biesta and Tedder, 2007.

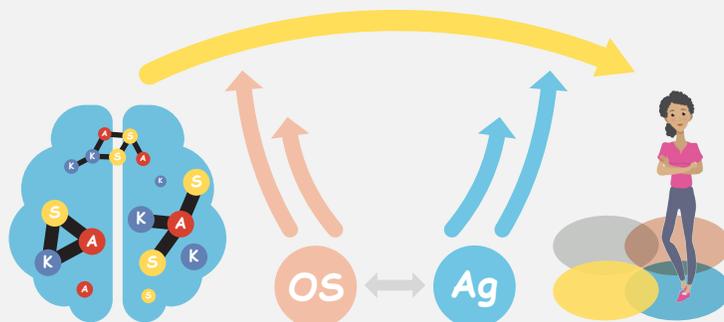
Figure 2

Key components for gender-transformative life skills programming



Bulding Competencies

Networks of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) are built over time.



Translation & Mediation

The process of activating KSA networks through action, and the ways in which opportunity structures and agency influence that process.

Opportunity Structures (OS): Policies, institutions, networks, social norms, and gender expectations that limit or enable a wider scope of possible action.

Agency (Ag): One's ability to see and make choices and to exert control over one's own life.

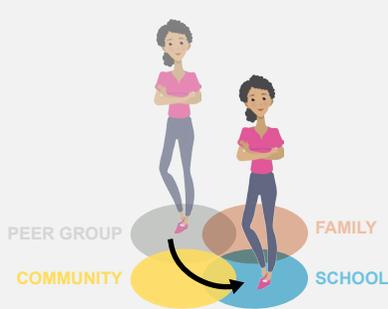
relationships with others. Together these shortcomings can lead unintentionally to the development of programs that perpetuate inequality, the setting of unrealistic goals and expectations for girls, the perpetuation of the status quo, or worse, putting girls in harm's way.

Key components and principles to a gender-transformative approach to girls' life skills education

To avoid the traps of a narrow focus on skills and inattention to social change, program designers, implementers, and policymakers must begin to attend

to the *whats* and *hows* of life skills development with an eye toward transforming girls' life outcomes. While girls (and boys) must be equipped with the 21st century skills to secure jobs in an increasingly automated world and to make decisions in an increasingly interconnected world, practitioners must think about supporting them not only to change with new 21st century realities, but also to set their own course and to shape these realities themselves. For vulnerable girls around the world, this means equipping them with the strategic gender knowledge, skills, and attitudes to identify and contest 21st century conditions of gender subordination, oppression, and marginalization.¹⁴

¹⁴ While this paper focuses specifically on girls' life skills education, a gender perspective to life skills can and should also be applied to boys. We especially encourage readers to apply the proposed framework beyond our single gender focus, especially when designing life skills programs for boys with the aim of equipping them to better adapt to, thrive in, and transform their gendered realities.



Empowered Action

Action that enables girls to pursue choices previously denied to them.



Improved Life Outcomes

E.g., completed schooling, better health, financial and job security, civic participation.



Systemic Change

E.g., social, political, economic, psychological.

Girls' life skills education is a well-positioned platform for multisector stakeholders to secure an easy win: ensuring girls around the world receive the opportunities, resources, and support to achieve the goal of gender-transformative change. But to achieve this, practitioners and policymakers first need to conceptualize life skills as being broader than just skills; second, they need to recognize that life skills are merely one component in a dynamic and nonlinear process of cognitive, socioemotional, psychological, behavioral, and social development and change. Combining concepts from education and youth development (specifically from the fields of neuroscience and developmental psychology) as well as from gender empowerment, the remainder of this paper presents key components and underlying principles critical to a gender-transformative approach to girls' life skills education.

Specifically, it identifies five points in a theory linking life skills development to social change: building competencies, translation and mediation, empowered action, improved life outcomes, and systemic change (see Figure 2). Practitioners should tune in to each of these points in the design, delivery, and evaluation of life skills programming.

For example, while building competencies, the focus should be on the curricula, pedagogies, learning environments, and inter- and intrapersonal relationships that help to facilitate girls' development of complex networks of KSAs. In learning to translate those KSAs into empowered action in a multitude of contexts, the focus should be on supporting girls to recognize and leverage mediating factors like opportunity structures and agency that ultimately shape her choices

and influence the quality of her actions regardless of what KSAs she possesses. Practitioners should also recognize the iterative nature of this process of development and change: successful outcomes feed back into the process of building, reinforcing, and strengthening competencies. This also triggers a ripple effect within the girl's multitude of contexts that creates new opportunity structures and builds agency. This, in turn, influences her ability to translate KSAs into empowered action under different circumstances, contexts, and times in her life. On the other side, unsuccessful outcomes also feed back into the process, this time weakening or suppressing KSAs, diminishing her agency, and perhaps even strengthening negative opportunity structures that inhibit her capacity to act in a desirable way or as an autonomous individual. The following sections discuss these components in more detail.

Conceptualize life skills as competencies and operationalize life skills as KSA networks

As this paper has argued, life skills are not a specific set of skills for life but rather broader competencies that enable empowered action toward a desired life outcome. The KSAs constituting these competencies may be developed under specific circumstances (e.g., a safe space, a trying experience, a sport field, a problem-based activity), but are highly transferable and can be used across multiple settings and life situations—as wide-ranging as negotiating delaying early marriage, persuading a partner to use contraception, or resolving a conflict with a peer.¹⁵

KSAs can be further conceptualized as a network of interconnected cognitive, non-cognitive, and meta-cognitive assets, akin to the interconnected neurons in our brains that allow us to perform specific

functions with our minds and bodies (see Figure 3). Indeed, evidence from neuroscience and developmental psychology suggests that when infants develop new skills like facial recognition or crawling, the neural networks connecting different parts of the brain begin to organize and reorganize. As skills are refined, neural networks become more specialized to specific functions; as skills evolve, old connections may become deactivated, or “pruned.” Thus, the brain's neural map supporting our ability to perform the most basic to the most complex of tasks is intricately tied to the opportunities we have had to develop certain skills and to the experiences we have encountered at different times in our lives.¹⁶

Applying this evidence to life skills development should be done cautiously, as the research in neuroscience and developmental psychology has been focused on skills more easily mapped onto the brain's neurological structure. Nonetheless, the theories help clarify the process of life skills development at the individual level: as new KSAs are acquired and developed over time, they are connected to existing KSAs, some of which are already “networked” together into competencies, others of which may lie “dormant” until activated later in life. A specific set of KSAs might take on more or less prominence or combine with different KSAs, depending on the competencies needed to navigate different life situations. As the girl learns and applies new life skills, she has access to an increasingly sophisticated network of KSAs as existing KSA connections strengthen and expand, new connections are created, and old connections are pruned.

At a programmatic level, viewing life skills as competencies helps to achieve the task of directing attention away from abstract skills that are difficult to measure toward specific cognitive, socioemotional, psychological, and behavioral learning outcomes.¹⁷ Furthermore,

15 For a deeper discussion on the operationalization of competencies into knowledge, skills, and attitudes, see also the broader literature on competency models of learning, as well as OECD. (2005). *The Definition and Selection of Key Competences: Executive Summary*. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>.

16 Johnson, 2001; Johnson et al., 2009.

17 Whitehurst, 2016; Binkley et al., 2012.



Competencies

A network of KSAs that inform a girl's capacity and capability to navigate a life situation toward a desired outcome. Competencies describe what you can do with what you know, the tools you have, and the values, beliefs, and mindsets you hold, e.g., negotiate delaying early marriage, persuading partner to use contraception, resolve a conflict with a peer.

Knowledge

The information that one knows about a topic, e.g., strategic knowledge of gender and power, the risks and effects of early pregnancy, statutes against gender-based violence.

Skills

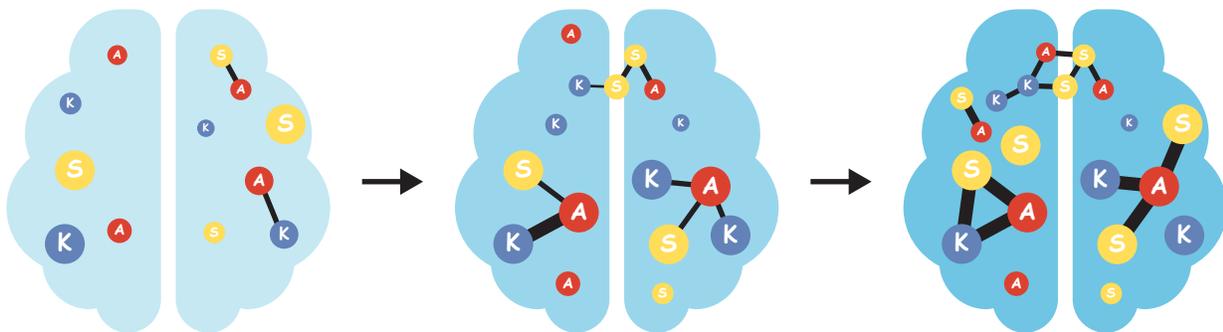
The “hard” and “soft” tools one acquires and develops to function in life, e.g., cognitive skills like critical thinking, socioemotional skills like empathy, interpersonal skills like communication, intrapersonal skills like self-regulation.

Attitudes

The mindset one has toward a topic, and the set of beliefs and values one holds about what is desirable, e.g., child marriage is a violation of the rights of a child, girls and women have the right to control their reproductive decisions, violence against women is never justified.

Figure 3

Life skills development as strengthening KSA networks and building competencies



As skills are refined, neural networks become more specialized to specific functions. As skills evolve, some connections are strengthened over time, while old connections may become deactivated.

operationalizing competencies as dynamic KSA networks allows practitioners to move beyond the oftentimes blurry lines of categorization. For example, is communication a skill or a competency? Rather, such operationalization allows practitioners to pinpoint the “raw” skill that is acquired and developed over time (e.g., communication as the interpersonal tool that enables a girl to use language to articulate an abstract thought). This is versus the more refined competence

for which the brain has recruited and activated as the best possible network of KSAs (e.g., communication as the combined capacity to recall relevant knowledge about a topic; to appropriately read one's audience and context; to self-regulate the degree to which one's stance on the topic is displayed through one's body language; and to deploy the right tone and style of speech). Making this distinction (skill versus competency) will enable practitioners to better identify

and design curricula for the KSAs they seek to help girls develop. Additionally, it will enable better evaluation of girls' life skills development (e.g., whether a girl can articulate an abstract thought) compared to girls' life outcomes (e.g., whether a girl can articulate an abstract thought for conveying an alternative consequence to a scenario proposed by her conversation partner).

To illustrate, let us take the program goal of building a girl's negotiation skills so that she can convince her father to delay her marriage so that she can continue and complete secondary school. This framework would view negotiating delayed marriage as a competence requiring the coming together of following KSAs: Knowledge about the returns to secondary education, the negative consequences of early marriage, gender and power, anti-child marriage laws, and her rights. Skills like risk assessment, listening, understanding another person's point of view, self-control, positive self-concept, and goal-orientation. Pro-equality atti-

tudes like a healthy intolerance of gender injustice, or being determined to achieve one's aspirations despite the odds. Beliefs like girls' rights are human rights and a girl's destiny is not in the home would also fall under such attitudes. Designers, implementers, and policy-makers will better grasp the whats of girls' life skills programming as they conceptualize negotiation as a network of KSAs. The next sections turn to unpacking the hows.

Expand attention from transferability to the process of translation

As girls build both strategic and practical KSAs, the expectation is that they will be able to transfer these competencies from one context to another. Transferability is what distinguishes life skills from other types of context-specific skills, like financial literacy or vocational skills. Yet, while transferability is a defining characteristic of life skills, it is more important for practitioners to bear in mind the girl's capacity to

Translation

The process of activating KSA networks (competencies) through action in different life situations to achieve a desired life outcome.

Figure 4

Translating competencies to empowered action





Box 1

The dynamic system behind life skills development

Like the development of motor skills or cognitive skills, life skills development occurs in a dynamic system. As such, it is continuous; there are clear patterns of predictability, but its transformative outcomes are non-linear and thus rather unpredictable.ⁱ To elaborate:

- Life skills development is continuous in that what happens in the past influences the future. Where girls begin in a life skills program and where she can go depends on what experiences and opportunities to develop life skills she has had in the past.
- Life skills development has clear recognizable patterns of achievement (e.g., increased self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-empowerment, etc.). Importantly, these patterns are interdependent on the individual's development of competencies, as well as her history of successfully activating KSA networks through action and the conditions of her external and interpersonal environments.
- Life skills development is non-linear in that small changes (e.g., the development of a new KSA network, an increase in agency achieved by the girl, or the elimination of a discriminatory law in the girl's context) can lead to large differences in outcomes. Likewise, big changes can lead to small differences in outcomes, or the same action can have different outcomes, depending on the context.

i Thelen, 2005.

translate life skills into action in different contexts (see Figure 4).

By drawing attention to the process of translation rather than just on the transferability of skills, practitioners and policymakers are forced to expand their attention on outcomes to a focus on how life skills facilitated the change that led to those outcomes, and whether and how this change could be brought to bear under different circumstances. For instance, rather than focusing only on whether or not a girl successfully applied leadership skills developed in a life skills program to a new real-life situation, a focus on translation would encourage stakeholders to think about how girls learn to activate leadership-relevant KSA networks through action in one context compared to another. This process of translation precedes the transferability of KSAs, determining whether girls can put to use in one

situation compared to another what they have learned in a life skills program.

Keep in mind that translation happens in a dynamic system

Key to designing and implementing life skills programming that strengthens girls' capacities to translate competencies into empowered action is to understand that translation is not just an individual process in which the girl converts her life skills into action or applies her life skills in a different context. This would make it easy for programs to place the onus of change on the individual girl herself.

Rather, translation happens in a dynamic system where interdependent conditions within the individual girl (e.g., KSA networks; her level of agency), in her

environment (e.g., opportunity structures; the ecology supporting her agency, which is discussed in the next section), and in her history (e.g., whether she successfully translated competencies into empowered action in the past) interact to co-equally produce an action or behavior in a specific moment in time. Put simply, the process of translating KSAs into action is more of a dialogical, social process than an individual process. Research in developmental psychology and dynamic systems supports this notion, suggesting that a single-cause explanation for an observed action is insufficient when a more dynamic ecological system of interconnected, interacting, and interdependent parts is mutually producing that outcome.¹⁸

Understanding translation as a dialogical process taking place in a dynamic system ensures that practitioners focus on the individual, contextual, and relational dimensions of life skills development for transformative social change. Indeed, this is where developmental psychology aligns with actors critical of girls' and women's empowerment approaches that are focused on the self-improvement of the individual. That is, critical feminists point to the important role that the girl's structural environment and social relationships play in mediating the girl's ability to translate resources (in this case, KSA networks or competencies) into action previously denied.¹⁹ Translating life skills—and hence transferring life skills—is enabled or constrained by factors both internal and external to the girl herself. As such, a theory of change for girls' life skills education must include such mediating factors, lest KSAs remain “stuck” (untranslatable and untransferable) in the setting in which they were learned. We discuss two important mediating factors in more detail below and how they influence the translation of KSAs into empowered action.

Attend to the factors mediating translation

Just as life skills at an individual level are not developed as isolated skills but in relation to the connection and activation of dynamic KSA networks over time, life skills development and their translation entail dynamic social processes, too. That is, life skills are not translated in a vacuum but in relation to the mediating influence of the opportunity structures in her environment and her level of agency, which is itself interdependent with her context (see Figure 5). Together, opportunity structures and agency make the goal of transformational change—and thus life skills development for girls' empowerment—a social relational process in which the development and change of both the individual girl and her relations with others and her context must be part of the vision. Greater programmatic attention must thus be given to those mediating factors making unpredictable the transformative life outcomes that practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders hold dear.

A closer look at opportunity structures

Opportunity structures define the degree to which a girl's context is enabling or not. They include the gender norms, expectations, stereotypes, and attitudes of society that practitioners already recognize play an important role in laying out a possible set of actions and aspirational futures for the girl.²⁰ In addition, they include the usual suspects of local policy structures and the provisions offered by and within the girl's physical environment (e.g., at school) that determine to what institutions, services, and resources the girl may have access.²¹ But opportunity structures also include her social networks; in particular, the presence of social relations of affiliation and care that can be converted into social capital, economic resources, and power that open the door to future opportunities

¹⁸ Adolph and Robinson, 2013; Thelen, 2005.

¹⁹ Kabeer, 1999.; Stromquist, 2015; Mosedale, 2005. Van Eerdewijk, 2017.

²⁰ Beaman et al., 2012; DeJaeghere, 2011; Bandiera et al., 2014.

²¹ Marcus and Page, 2016; Maswikwa et al., 2015.



Mediation

The dialogical process through which opportunity structures and agency influence the translation of life skills into empowered action.

Opportunity Structures

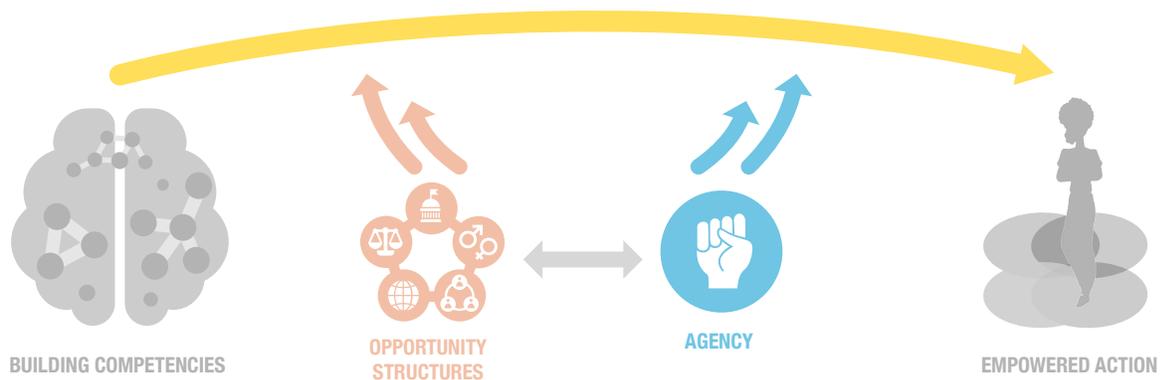
The gendered economic, social, political, and policy structures that enhance or inhibit a girl's choices and opportunities; social networks that can be converted into social capital and opportunities; the internal and external pathways of opportunities that have been laid out from previous experiences.

Agency

The capacity of a girl to see and make choices and to exert control over her own life; varies over time and across contexts; dependent on the recognition and legitimation by others; interdependent with the agency of others; determines her relationship to her environment.

Figure 5

Mediating the translation of competencies to empowered action



Translating competencies to action is dependent on and influenced by the interplay between opportunity structures (OS) and a girl's agency (Ag).

once closed off to her.²² Such relationships can be fostered through gender-responsive pedagogical practices, active and experiential learning, critical dialogues, and other reflective opportunity structures embedded in her learning environments.²³ Opportunity structures also include the internal realm of choices made possible by previous experiences, learning, and reflection.²⁴ In these ways, opportunity structures—

both positive and negative—define the most proximal and palpable aspects of the context—both external and internal contexts—in which the girl is located and interacts.

To better illustrate, imagine an adolescent girl at the onset of becoming sexually active. The opportunity structures that can determine whether she is able to activate specific KSA networks in a manner that improves her life outcomes (e.g., reduced risk of early pregnancy) may include: whether or not a commu-

²² DeJaeghere et al., 2016.

²³ DeJaeghere et al., 2016; Marcus and Page, 2016; Sahni, 2017.

²⁴ Biesta and Tedder, 2007; van Eerdewijk et al, 2017; Archer, 2003.

nity health center exists nearby; whether or not this health center is stocked with informational pamphlets on contraception; or whether or not it carries a supply of condoms that she can access confidentially or anonymously. Her opportunity structures may also include whether or not her country has passed legislation criminalizing perpetrators of rape, rather than enabling custom to force her to marry her rapist. And, as mentioned above, opportunity structures may also exist within her (rather than externally to her) in the form of the KSA networks laid out from experience. For instance, she may have participated in a life skills program that taught her how to communicate assertively with an intimate partner, establishing important KSAs that she would need at this moment in time. Thus, in the process of translation, opportunity structures play a critical role in enhancing or inhibiting the girl's ability to translate life skills into empowered action. Without some or all of these opportunity structures in place, the girl may not be able to act in a transformative way that positively changes her life circumstances, no matter how sophisticated her KSA networks may be. In this way, out of all the possible dimensions of a girl's context, opportunity structures deserve special attention in any framework for gender-transformative life skills development (see Box 2 for other ways to consider context in girls' life skills programming).

A closer look at agency

The girl's ability to translate competencies into action also depends on the degree to which she is an agent, or the driver, in all realms of her life, not just within the program environment. That is, for life skills to enable a girl to participate meaningfully in and to affect change in the various life contexts that she navigates outside of the program setting, she must simultaneously achieve a level of agency to live a full life of her own choosing. Yet, achieving this level of agency is not entirely up to her; nor can it be built in isolation from her environment.

According to theories of agency and empowerment, agency can be defined as the girl's ability to see and to make strategic life choices based on her vision of what is possible and in pursuit of what she desires.²⁷ But agency is not a power that one possesses; it is not an individual capacity. Rather, it is something that one achieves; it is something that one acts out in the present moment to bring about a desired future.²⁸

In addition, agency is at once endogenous and exogenous, engendered from within and without; it is both individual and relational. In other words, it depends on the quality or meaningfulness of her relationships with peers, facilitators, mentors, parents, and other significant individuals in her life.²⁹ It also depends on whether others view her as an autonomous individual. By extension, her agency depends on the degree of agency achieved by others. A classic example is where girls' and women's agency is dependent on the agency of boys and men. If boys and men remain out of the driver's seat in their own lives, the likelihood of girls and women increasing control over their own lives remain slim.

Many life skills programs and girls' empowerment programs have a focus on building girls' agency. But most of these programs have been anchored around a simple vision of depositing a sense of possibility, voice, and self-worth in the girl. Consequently, the capacity for autonomous and independent action that may have been "taught" may stay within the confines of the learning space because the program did not consider the mediating effect of her environment. Becoming an agent, or building one's level agency, does not happen suddenly, nor is it transferred from educator to learner. Rather, it develops and fluctuates over the life course and across life situations through an iterative and dialogical process of building upon

²⁷ Alsop et al., 2006; Kabeer, 1999; Stromquist, 2015; van Eerdewijk et al., 2017.

²⁸ Biesta and Tedder, 2007.

²⁹ DeJaeghere, 2016; USAID, 2016.



past achievements, learning, and patterns of action.³⁰ As new choices and actions are made possible by new or strengthened KSA networks, and as opportunity structures constrain or enable the girl to act on those choices, the relationship between the girl and her environment is changed for better or for worse. This relationship, the interaction between opportunity structures and agency, ultimately determines whether the girl can successfully translate competencies into empowered action.

Take for example again the adolescent girl at the onset of becoming sexually active. Due to the KSA networks she has developed in a past life skills program and to the opportunity structures present in her environment, she may be able to formulate three possible sets of action: one in which she convinces her partner to use contraception, a second that has her leaving the situation of her own free will, and a third marked by violence by her partner against her. The level of agency she achieves through each of those actions will differ. But, regardless of which set of actions she pursues, the outcome is also dependent on whether her partner acknowledges her agency—an acknowledgment that is itself tied to his own agency, opportunity structures, and KSAs. Let's say that she chooses to leave the situation and that her partner respects her decision to do so. Not only does that action denote the girl's achievement of a high degree of agency; but that experience of making an autonomous choice and the set of actions and KSAs underlying that choice become a point of reference for responding to future challenging encounters. Had her partner not recognized the girl as an autonomous individual with sexual and reproductive rights, the outcome of her decision may likely have resulted in sexual and/or physical violence against her. As a result, in future encounters, some pathways of action may no longer be visible to her or desirable—even if they may be the more

empowering option—because of the negative consequences of her choice in the last encounter.

While opportunity structures outline possible pathways of action; agency influences the quality of her actions by determining the quality of her engagement with her environment. Together, opportunity structures and agency determine how empowering and transformative the girl's translation from competencies to action can be.

Develop life skills across the lifetime

Thus far, this paper assumes that the girl at the center is adolescent, the age typically targeted by girls' life skills programming. But the oft-discussed challenges shaping girls' life circumstances in adolescence are embedded in gender-unequal realities that start far earlier in her life. Moreover, evidence in neuroscience and developmental psychology suggests that the age at which learning happens affects how a skill is acquired and what regions of the brain are connected, and that the neural basis of complex skills in adulthood mirror those developed in infancy and childhood.³¹ Although these studies did not look specifically at how life skills are mapped onto brain structure, the conclusion still points to a powerful lesson: adolescence may be too late for life skills interventions, especially those intended to achieve transformative life outcomes. It is then imperative that practitioners not gloss over the significance of early life skills development in shaping girls' competencies as they age. Similar to the development and specialization of neural networks supporting other cognitive, behavioral, and motor skills, life skills development—the development and specialization of KSA networks—is dependent on prior experiences, learning, and opportunities for KSA network specialization. Just as girls' life skills development is constrained by gender-oppressive social, political, and economic environments, the neurocognitive

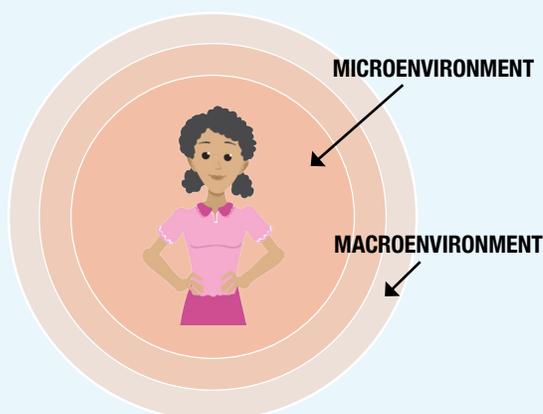
³⁰ Biesta and Tedder, 2007.

³¹ Johnson, 2001; Johnson et al., 2009.

Box 2**Three additional ways to bring context into play**

In most life skills programs, context tends to serve as the backdrop to the life problem girls face or as the external enabling or disabling environment in which girls are situated.²⁵ Many times, context is conceptualized as multi-layered, starting from the girl's most proximal microenvironment and extending outward like concentric rings to her most distant macro environment (see Figure 6). If context is viewed as dynamic, it is conceptualized as evolving with time or with other shifting external forces like social and economic policy, the political climate, or even cultural change.

In this paper, context is conceptualized not only as the multiple settings in which the girl moves about in her day-to-day but also as another dynamic factor at play in the translation and mediation of life skills into empowered action. That is, context includes the overlapping external environments in which the girl is located: her peer group, her family, her community, the policy

Figure 6**Context as multi-layered environments**

²⁵ Dupuy and Halvorsen, 2016.

context, the workplace, a health care center, or even the road to school. But, more importantly, context is something with which she interacts, by which she is shaped, and on which she acts (see Figure 7).

This paper has identified opportunity structures as the most important aspect of context to consider in the translation of life skills into empowered action. But context can also be brought into play at three other critical points in life skills interventions: in program design or adaptation, program delivery and pedagogy, and in preparation for girls to move from the safe space of the program to her lived realities.

1. Program design

First, because the challenges and opportunities girls face in their daily lives differ from setting to setting and country to country, context should play a key role in the design or adaptation of life skills programming. Many programs already conduct needs assessments and mid-course evaluations to ensure the program design process is inclusive and identifies the context-specific “life skills” that girls may need to overcome the context-specific effects of gender inequality. This is good practice but contributes to the narrow focus on skills for self-improvement as well as to the lack of attention to social change. Instead, programs should go one step further and, through an inclusive and participatory process with girls, identify aspects of girls’ contexts to include in a theory of change for how context-specific life skills can be linked to broader gender transformative change. Specifically, context should inform how practitioners incorporate the knowledge about gender and power and the development of a gender consciousness that girls need to counter



Figure 7

Context as multidimensional



gender-based challenges faced across her different circles of context.

2. Program delivery

Second, because the learning environment of a life skills program plays such a critical role in the acquisition of KSAs, as well as in the connections made between KSA networks, the program context—especially the quality of program delivery and pedagogy—is vitally important to consider in linking life skills development to the learning and life outcomes of girls. Coincidentally, the non-formal sector (e.g., programs provided by NGOs) in which most girls' life skills programming are located offers the perfect space to try out innovative delivery mechanisms and non-traditional, critical dialogical, problem-based, and/or activity-based teaching and learning practices. In addition to creating different and potentially empowering learning environments, program implementers should take into consideration whether safe spaces in the program setting are safe and inclusive, or whether female mentors employed by the program might need extra technical and psychosocial support to facilitate gender transformative activities or to deliver

oftentimes culturally sensitive gender transformative curricula.

And, because the girl does not come to a life skills program as an empty slate, program implementers must also look at the girl as part of the program context. That is, what are the assets (the existing KSA networks) that the girl brings and on which the life skills program can build new or strengthen existing connections? Research on learner-centered pedagogies suggests that learning is most effective when building on the experiences and knowledge that children carry with them.²⁶ A life skills learning environment should be no different.

3. Moving from safe spaces to lived realities

Finally, because the opportunity structures (and relations of power) operating within her different circles of context ultimately constrain or enable her ability to translate skills into action, developing the girl's ability to read her context and to make decisions based on that read are critically important to life skills programming. This includes reading the situation, the actors directly or indirectly involved, the historical context, and the potential consequences of one course of action versus another, among many other things. As the girl moves from one context to another, especially from the safe space of the program to the more gender discriminatory environments outside of the program, this ability to read her contexts and to identify opportunity structures that she can leverage to her advantage determines her capacity to apply life skills to different life situations. Reading context, especially opportunity structures, is thus an important competency in and of itself—perhaps one that we would deem a foundational life skill that equips the girl for any life situation.

²⁶ Sahni, 2017; Vavrus, 2009; Vavrus and Bartlett, 2013; Haberland, 2015.

and psychological basis of girls' life skills development is constrained by the lack of opportunities to lay out the KSA networks undergirding more foundational competencies.

Take the earlier example describing the KSAs a girl might need to negotiate delaying her marriage. Now imagine that the girl at the center of that example is 7 years old. At this age, the girl may not be facing early marriage, but instead may want to play soccer—a sport that, in this example, her community may consider a boy's activity. In this lower-stakes situation, the girl would have to draw upon similar if not more basic KSAs than what she would need to activate a few years later when negotiating to delay her own marriage. Although more limited in scope, these may include: knowledge of gender differences and gender expectations, skills like positive self-concept and goal-orientation, and attitudes like determination to achieve one's aspirations and the belief that girls can also play soccer would come together to form the competencies needed to negotiate sports participation.

Because KSAs form more complex and specialized networks over time and through practice, there are clear program opportunities to strengthen the KSAs of girls in early childhood. More importantly, there is a clear need to build connections between the KSAs developed in early childhood and those KSAs she may need through early adolescence into adolescence, the time when gender-based challenges may be most consequential. Like curricular progressions in subject knowledge in school (e.g., basic principles of physics come before advanced principles of physics), it is im-

portant to consider the nature of foundational life skills, starting from building block competencies early in life that are critical for the development of more complex competencies over time. As such, practitioners focused on adolescent girls' life skills must expand their target age population, if not at minimum coordinate with others implementing interventions across other points in the girl's lifetime.

Implications and next steps

The first step to clarifying the concept of life skills is disentangling the KSAs that constitute competencies. It is not enough, however, to ensure life skills development links to transformative life outcomes. Practitioners must also attend to the dynamic and dialogical process of translation and mediation that determines whether, and how, a girl can transfer life skills from one context to another in a manner that is both empowering and transformative. Successful translation depends greatly on the capacity of the girl to learn from the past, to read her present context, to envision possibilities, and to act on her choices. It also depends on whether others recognize her autonomy as an agent of her own life and on the opportunity structures present or missing in her environment and relationships at the time of action.

Much of this paper has been directed at practitioners implementing girls' life skills programming in non-formal settings. But given the long-term developmental aspects of life skills, it is problematic for girls' life skills programming to remain confined within such spaces. Granted, the informality of this space has offered NGOs and practitioners the freedom to develop and test innovative approaches to girls' life skills programming. However, this paper suggests that such an approach to girls' life skills development at the periphery of the education system limits the potential for widespread social change for marginalized and vulnerable girls. Although small improvements in girls' life out-

View our animation on the process of translating competencies to empowered action:

<http://brook.gs/2z7Q7d5>



comes set in motion by non-formal or extracurricular life skills programs can lead to a ripple effect of wider change, progress will be slow without the integration of life skills programming into the standard practice of the formal education space where both girls and boys are served. Indeed, this paper suggests that life skills development should not be conceived by education policymakers, school administrators, and classroom teachers as supplemental to existing curricular goals nor specific to girls only, but as core and foundational to the vision of 21st century education systems for all children, including boys. Indeed, gender-transformative life skills education that is good for girls will be good for boys as well. Moreover, the evidence shows a wide-ranging set of outcomes associated with life skills development, including improved health and employment outcomes, that are important for achieving the wider social and economic development goals of education systems.³²

This point about the need to integrate life skills programming into formal learning spaces has great implications for program design and implementation, especially when considering life skills from a dynamic systems perspective. Indeed, the non-linearity of life skills development and the influence of key mediating factors creates a degree of unpredictability and interdependency that makes it challenging for practitioners to design transformative life skills programming for girls in non-formal learning environments, let alone in formal learning environments. In addition, the continuous flow and continuous change of life skills development mean that practitioners and policymakers must be strategic in terms of when life skills programming are delivered in a girls' lifetime, in what "dosage", through what channels, and in what sequence of life skills. This calls for greater coordination between programs targeting different age groups of marginalized girls and different KSAs and competencies to better align

disparate programs and to ensure continuity in the girl's development over time.

In addition, to prepare girls for the crucial moment when learning must be put into practice in far more complex spheres than the program environment, practitioners must consider designing programs so that girls can practice translation in scenarios where the consequences of mediation are lower in stakes. Although prescribing implementation pathways is beyond the scope of this paper, research suggests that the most effective and desirable methods of nurturing and modeling the kinds of values, attitudes, and beliefs include learner-centered, participatory, experiential, and critical pedagogies. These approaches enable girls to reflect upon and envision possible choices in relation to circumstances in the past, present, or future.³³ In doing so, girls can draw on key KSAs while exercising agency and choice in support of better outcomes without being placed in harm's way.

In thinking of the mediating effect of opportunity structures on the girl's ability to translate skills into action, practitioners must also consider how opportunity structures within girls' immediate learning environment can impede on girls' agency. Specifically, consider the degree of empowerment and agency with which an educator performs the act of teaching itself. The educator's agency thus has a great deal of influence on the types of learning opportunities and on the

32 Bandiera, n.d.; Adoho et al., 2014; Alcid, 2014; Shahnaz and Karim, 2008; Bandiera et al, 2014; Jackson et al., 2007

33 For examples of such activities, see Sahni, Urvashi. (2017). *Reaching for the Sky: Empowering Girls through Education*. Washington, DC: Brookings Press.; USAID, PEPFAR, Youth Power. (2016). *Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills among Adolescents and Young Adults*. [Draft for review.] Washington, DC: USAID, PEPFAR, Youth Power.; Harvey, B., Stuart, J., Swan, T. (2000). Evaluation of a drama-in-education programme to increase AIDS awareness in South African high schools: A randomized community intervention trial. *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 11, no. 2: 105-111.; Calero, Carla; Soares, Yuri; Corseuil, Carlos; Gonzales, Veronica; Kluge, Jochen. (2014). Can Arts-Based Interventions Enhance Labor Market Outcomes among Youth? Evidence from a Randomized Trial in Rio de Janeiro. IZA Discussion Paper no. 8210.; Shamagonam, James; Priscilla S. Reddy, Robert A. C. Ruiter, Myra Taylor, Champakial C. Jinabhai, Pepijn Van Empelen, Bart Van Den Borne. (2005). The Effects of a Systematically Developed Photo-Novella on Knowledge, Attitudes, Communication and Behavioural Intentions with Respect to Sexually Transmitted Infections among Secondary School Learners in South Africa. *Health Promotion International* 20, no. 2: 157-165.

possibility of the girl developing her capacity to make choices and to build her agency. While some research shows that female educators from similar contexts as the learners may be more successful facilitators,³⁴ in some cases, it means that the educators themselves may lack or oppose the competencies and agency that they are seeking to cultivate. Thus, it is crucial that comprehensive educator training is also embedded in program design and implementation to ensure that the context of the learning space itself supports the positive development of the girl's agency.

The framework offered in this paper also has implications for the measurement and assessment of life skills. While an in-depth discussion on life skills assessment is beyond the scope of this paper, viewing life skills development as a dynamic and dialogical process points to an ironic context-specificity and time-specificity for what has traditionally been conceptualized as constant and transferable. In other words, KSA networks are “softly assembled.” They are highly variable as new connections are developed and old connections are pruned. Any attempts at measuring girls' life skills must consider the relative stability of competencies over time and across situations, rather than presume that a girl may have acquired it upon completion of a program.³⁵ Like other cognitive behavioral skills that girls (and boys) develop across their lifetime, what is captured about a girls' state of life skills at one point in time may be entirely different if measured at another time or in a different context.

Importantly, the framework described in this paper considers the influence of mediating factors on the process of successfully translating KSAs into empowered action. Such a framework could help push evaluators to think more holistically about incorporating indicators that capture context, translation, and mediation in measurements attempting to link life skills

development to individual life outcomes for the girl and to wider systemic social change.

More research is needed to better understand how to design, implement, and assess gender-transformative life skills programming. In the meantime, an important next step is to bring together key actors at the forefront of girls' life skills programming—including those at UNICEF, the U.K.'s Department for International Development's Girls' Education Challenge, Room to Read, Dream a Dream, and a host of other girls' education NGOs—to put the conceptual framework offered here to the test. Important to this endeavor will be to bring to the table long-standing actors in the life skills education space who have not traditionally taken a gender-transformative approach but have done much to advance the evidence around positive youth development, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Youth Power collaborative, the Youth Employment Funders' Group, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and those promoting a developmental assets approach. Given the widespread popularity of life skills and the plethora of definitions and approaches, it is critical that the field begin to move toward a consistent and holistic framework defined by a set of core components and key principles. The one proposed here draws from research in neuroscience, developmental psychology, and gender and empowerment to outline an approach that places learning and gender-transformative change at the center.

Conclusions

Unlike the technical problems that typically characterize what learners face in school or vocational training, the gender-based challenges that girls (and boys) must navigate in life are grounded and embedded in dynamic structures of inequality, relations of power, and histories of oppression. The life challenges girls face are compounded by other forms of marginaliza-

34 Tembon and Fort, 2008.

35 Smith and Thelen, 2003.; Thelen, 2005.



“Shifting attention in life skills programming from thinking specifically about skills to thinking about the interconnected networks of KSAs entails a more deliberate attempt to develop a wider breadth of skills in time with the mastery of context-specific information and the development of a gender consciousness.”

tion: socioeconomic status, class or caste, religion, indigeneity, sexual orientation, geographic location, among others. If practitioners, policymakers, and other key stakeholders start with the assumption that marginalized girls (and boys) need life skills because of the disempowering effects of gender inequality or poverty, or because of their heightened vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, then we would argue that any life skills program that aims to help equip the girl (or boy) to thrive in her existing environment is woefully inadequate.

Instead, this paper argues that life skills practitioners must intentionally build in transformational social change outcomes into their program goals and design, rather than placing the burden of social change on girls themselves—regardless of how empowered they are—once they leave the program. Such social

change outcomes can range from a change in the gendered rules of engagement, a transformation of the terms of recognition by others, or an increase in the girl's capacity to live a life of her own choosing.

This abstract mission of providing girls with the skills they need to be successful in and beyond school is easy to get behind, but challenging to define let alone measure progress. Our framework is complex, nuanced, and iterative. Its nonlinear progression suggests a difficult practical application, but triggering social change was not meant to be easy. We've identified four underlying principles (see Box 3) to help practitioners and policymakers adapt or retrofit this framework to new or existing life skills programming.

Shifting attention in life skills programming from thinking specifically about skills to thinking about

Box 3**Four core principles for gender-transformative life skills programming****Consider a broader range of competences.**

Life skills are competencies constituted by dynamic networks of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Life skills practitioners and policymakers must therefore consider a broader range of competencies and be specific about the KSAs that constitute those competencies.

Design for five touch points in programming.

Program design, delivery, and assessment must consider five critical touch points in life skills development and social change: 1) building competencies, 2) translation and mediation, 3) empowered action, 4) individual life outcome, and 5) systemic change.

Be intentional about development and change.

Life skills development is a continuous, dialogical, and non-linear process of cognitive, emotional, psychological, behavioral, and social change that happens over the life course. Life skills practitioners must therefore be intentional about the interaction between the development and change happening at the level of the individual girl and at the level of her community and broader environment.

Support girls to ‘read’ context, gender, and power.

Life skills programs must support girls to recognize and leverage the dynamic mediating factors (opportunity structures and agency) that influence her capacity to translate KSAs into empowered action. This includes equipping girls with the ability to read her contexts and with an understanding of gender and power.



the interconnected networks of KSAs entails a more deliberate attempt to develop a wider breadth of skills in time with the mastery of context-specific information and the development of a gender consciousness. Re-conceptualizing the whats of life skills is the first step to designing more holistic life skills programming that builds girls' competencies and capacities to function both independently and interdependently in society. Tending to the hows of life skills ensures programming is transformative, and that KSAs developed in one context are transferable from situation to situation and translate into action that changes the circumstances that created the life obstacles in the first place. It also points attention to the opportunity structures that mediate the successful translation of life skills into empowered action, and the important role of agency in mediating the quality of the girl's engagement with her environment.

Defining life skills as competencies pushes the field to consider a wider breadth of skills when designing interventions that build girls' capacity to envision and pursue alternative futures, to stand up against gender injustice, and to participate fully in society as equal human beings. It moves us from banking systems of empowerment to question the roles of pedagogy and the application of learning outcomes to affect change in life outcomes for girls. Importantly, it shifts our comprehension of skills from linear notions to dynamic processes. However, this framework should not place the onus of development and change solely on the shoulders of girls. After all, in order to lead successful and meaningful lives of their own choosing, girls must have the capacity to choose. Whether or not she has choice is heavily influenced by the opportunity structures in her environment that are out of her control no matter her degree of agency.

Rather, because of its explicit recognition of the important role of context, the framework presented in this paper necessitates that it be adopted by practitioners and policymakers simultaneously with interventions

targeting social norms change within the communities from which girls come; specifically negative social attitudes toward girls' or boys' education; restrictive gender norms, practices, and expectations (for both females and males); structures of gender-based inequality; unequal gender relations, etc. This is especially the case for girls because of the potential for backlash or violence against girls by members of the community when girls begin to display behaviors and attitudes that may appear to go against the grain.

In addition, while this framework was developed with the girl in mind, the gender lens layered onto the life skills discussion makes this framework applicable to life skills work with boys. In particular, the attention to the KSAs that constitute key competencies; the significance of opportunity structures and the ability to read contexts; and the level of agency mediating the translation of skills to empowered action. More work is needed to understand what might be unique to boys' life skills development and practice that will help refine our understanding of how life skills can be tapped to help youth prepare for, adapt to, and define their 21st century realities.

References

- Adoho, F., Chakravarty, S., Korkoyah, D. T., Lundberg, M. K., & Tasneem, A. (2014). The impact of an adolescent girls employment program: the EPAG project in Liberia. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, (6832). Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2420245.
- Adolph, K. & Robinson, S. R. (2013). The road to walking: What learning to walk tells us about development. In P. Zelazo (Ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*, pp. 403-443. New York: Oxford University Press.
- AED Center for Gender Equity. (2009). Mentoring guide for life skills. Retrieved from <http://www.ungei.org/LifeSkills.pdf>
- AGE Africa. Chat Girls' Club. Retrieved from: <http://ageafrica.org/chats-girls-club/>
- Acid, A. (2014). A randomized controlled trial of Akazi Kanoze youth in rural Rwanda. Education Development Center, Inc.
- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M., & Holland, J. (2006). Empowerment in practice from analysis to implementation. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Amin, S., & et al. (2016). Delaying child marriage through community-based skills-development programs for girls: Results from a randomized controlled study in rural Bangladesh. New York and Dhaka: Population Council.
- Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Austrian, K., Hewett, P. C., Soler-Hampejsek, E., Bozzani, F., Behrman, J. R., & Digitale J. (2016). Adolescent girls empowerment programme: Research and evaluation mid-term technical report. Retrieved from Population Council: http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2016PGY_AGEPMidtermReport.pdf
- Bandiera, O., & et al. (n.d.). Empowerment and livelihood for adolescents in Sierra Leone. New Haven: Innovations for Poverty Action.
- Bandiera, O., & et al. (2014). Women's empowerment in action: Evidence from a randomized control trial in Africa. London School of Economics. Retrieved from <http://www.lse.ac.uk/economics/people/facultyPersonalPages/facultyFiles/RobinBurgess/WomensEmpowermentInAction0314.pdf>;
- Beaman, L., Dufo, E., Pande, R., & Topalova, P. (2012). Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: A policy experiment in India. *Science* 335, no. 6068: 582-586.
- Biesta, G. & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 39, no. 2: 132-149.
- Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). Defining twenty-first century skills. In B. McGaw & E. Care (Eds), *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills* (pp 17-66). New York, NY: Springer.
- Boler, T. & Aggleton, P. (2005). *Life skills education for HIV prevention: A critical analysis*. London: Save the Children and ActionAid International.
- Botvin, G. J., & Kantor, L. W. (2000). Preventing alcohol and tobacco use through life skills training. *Alcohol Research & Health*, 24(4), 250-257.
- Cadena, C., & et al. (2015). Assessing girls' life skills and children's reading habits in marginalized districts in Nepal. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University.
- Camfed. (2017). Camfed Internal Memo, August 2017. Unpublished internal memo, Camfed.
- CARE. (2014). *Leadership: A tool for girls' empowerment*. CARE.
- DeJaeghere, J., & Lee, S. K. (2011). What matters for marginalized girls and boys in Bangladesh: A capabilities approach for understanding educational well-being and empowerment. *Research in Comparative and International Education* 6, no. 1: 27-42.
- DeJaeghere, J., Pellowski Wiger, N., & Willemsen, L. W. (2016). Broadening educational outcomes: Social relations, skills development, and employability for youth. *Comparative Education Review* 60, no. 3: 457-479.
- Destrooper, T., & Parmentier, S. (2017). Gender-aware and place-based transitional justice in Guatemala. *Social & Legal Studies*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/0964663917718050.
- Dream a Dream. (2017). *Life Skills for a Society Powered by Choice*. Retrieved from <http://dreamadream.org/whitepapers>.
- Dupuy, K. & Halvorsen, S. (2016). *Life Skills, Girls, and Non-Formal Contexts in Developing Countries: A Global Literature Review*. Unpublished draft manuscript, Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Edmeades, J., Hayes, R., & Gaynair, G. (2014). Improving the lives of married, adolescent girls in Amhara, Ethiopia. Retrieved from ICRW: <https://www.icrw.org/publications/improving-the-lives-of-married-adolescent-girls-in-amhara-ethiopia/>
- Fancy, K. (2012). Because I am a girl – The state of the world's girls 2012. Retrieved from Plan International: <http://www.ungei.org/The-State-of-the-Worlds-Girls-Learning-for-Life-Plan-International-2012.pdf>
- Glasswing International. (2017). *Community schools*. Retrieved from: https://glasswing.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/GWI_Community-Schools_26Junio2017.pdf
- Grassroot Soccer. (n.d.). Taking an asset-based approach to adolescent development. Unpublished internal memo, Grassroot Soccer.
- Haberland, N. A. (2015). The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: A comprehensive review of evaluation studies. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 41(1): 31-42.
- Hillenbrand, E., Karim, N., Mohanraj, P., & Wu, D. (2015). Measuring gender-transformative change: A review of literature and promising practices. Working Paper. CARE USA.
- Jackson, R., & et al. (2007). Youth opportunity grant initiative: Impact and synthesis report. Decision Information Resources, Inc.
- Johnson, M. H. (2001). Functional brain development in humans. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 2: 475-483.
- Johnson, M. H.; Grossman, T., & Kadosh, K. C. (2009). Mapping functional brain development: Building a social brain through interactive specialization. *Developmental Psychology* 45, no. 1: 151-159.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change* 30: 435-464.
- Magnani, R., & et al. (2005). The impact of life skills education on adolescent sexual risk behaviors in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 36, 289-304.
- Marcus, R., & Page, E. (2016). Rigorous review: Girls' learning and empowerment - The role of school environments. Retrieved from UNGEI: http://www.ungei.org/index_6365.html
- Maswikwa, B., Richter, L., Kaufman, J., & Nandi, A. (2015). Minimum marriage age laws and the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent birth: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41, no. 2:58-68.
- Meyer, I. H. (2015). Resilience in the study of minority stress and health of sexual and gender minorities. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*: 2, no. 3, 209-213.



- Mosedale, S. (2005). Assessing women's empowerment: Towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of International Development*, 17(2): 243-257.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2016). Global competency for an inclusive world. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>
- Population Council. (2016). *Building Girls' Protective Assets: A Collection of Tools for Program Design*. New York: Population Council.
- Room to Read. (2015). *Global Monitoring Report 2015*. Retrieved from: https://www.roomtoread.org/media/634255/gmr-2015-final_low-resolution.pdf
- Roy, J. S. (2013). *Skill Training for Advancing Resources*. Retrieved from [http://www.brac.net/sites/default/files/5.%20PPT_Skill%20Training%20for%20Advancing%20Resources%20\(STAR\)%20compressed.pdf](http://www.brac.net/sites/default/files/5.%20PPT_Skill%20Training%20for%20Advancing%20Resources%20(STAR)%20compressed.pdf).
- Sahni, U. (2017). *Reaching for the Sky: Empowering Girls through Education*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Fraher, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Dershem, L., Makonnen, R., Nazneen, S., & Titus, S. (2013). Building development assets to empower adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh: evaluation of project Kishoree Kontha. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 23, no. 1: 171-184.
- The Search Institute. (2007). *Discovering what kids need to succeed. 40 developmental assets for adolescents*. Minneapolis, MN: The Search Institute.
- Shahnaz, R., & Karim, R. (2008). Providing microfinance and social space to empower adolescent girls: An evaluation of BRAC's ELA centres. Dhaka: BRAC.
- Side, A. (2016). Social and emotional competencies are important as academics. Retrieved from Teach for All: <http://teachforall.org/en/social-and-emotional-competencies-are-important-academics>
- Smith, L. B., & Thelen, E. (2003). Development as a dynamic system. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 7, no. 8: 343-348.
- Smolovic, S., Domovic Bulut, S., & Vujosevic, D. (2011). *Adolescents' peer leader manual for life skills development*. Retrieved from Save the Children: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/5182/pdf/5182.pdf>
- Standard Chartered. 2017. Sport + education = Economic empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.sc.com/en/sustainability/investing-in-communities/goal.html>
- Stromquist, N. P. (2015). Women's empowerment and education: Linking knowledge to transformative action. *European Journal of Education* 50, no. 3: 307-324.
- Svanemyr, J., & et al. (2015). Creating an enabling environment for adolescent sexual and reproductive health: A framework and promising approaches. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56, S7-S14.
- Tembon, M., & Fort, L. (2008). Girls' education in the 21st century: Gender equality, empowerment, and economic growth. Retrieved from World Bank: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080014368/DID_Girls_edu.pdf
- Thelen, E. (2005). Dynamic systems theory and the complexity of change. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 15, no. 2: 255-283.
- UKAID. (2015). *Girls' education challenge – Project profiles*. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415489/GEC-Project-Profile-booklet-March2015.pdf
- UNESCO (2001). *Life Skills – based education for drug use prevention training manual*. Retrieved from: <http://webarchive.unesco.org/20161120150914/http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/files/39462/1115.1214053DrugUsePreventionTrainingManual.pdf/DrugUsePreventionTrainingManual.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2012). *Regional handbook on life skills programmed for non-formal education*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002175/217507e.pdf>
- UNGEI. (2012). *Gender and skills development: A review background paper for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012*. Retrieved from https://www.macfound.org/media/files/UNGEI_Gender_and_Skills.pdf
- UNICEF. (2012). *Global evaluation of life skills education programmes*. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF_GLS_Web.pdf
- USAID & IREX. (2014). *21st century youth competencies assessment*. Retrieved from: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/west-bank-youth-competencies-assessment-full-report.pdf>
- USAID. (2012). *Youth in development policy: Realizing the demographic opportunity*. Washington, DC: USAID.
- USAID, PEPFAR, Youth Power. (2016). *Guiding principles for building soft skills among adolescents and young adults. [Draft for review.]* Washington, DC: USAID, PEPFAR, Youth Power.
- van Eerdewijk, A., Wong, F., Vaast, C., Newton, J., Tyszler, M., & Pennington, A. (2017). *White paper: A conceptual model of women and girls' empowerment*. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT).
- Vavrus, F. (2009). The cultural politics of constructivist pedagogies: Teacher education reform in the United Republic of Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development* 29: 303-11.
- Vavrus, F., & Bartlett, L. (2013). *Teaching in Tension: International Pedagogies, National Policies, and Teachers' Practices in Tanzania*. Pittsburgh, PA: Sense Publishers.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2016). *Grading soft skills: The Brookings soft skills report card. Evidence Speaks Reports 2* (no. 4).
- The World Bank. (2013). *Life skills: What are they, why do they matter, and how are they taught?* Retrieved from: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/569931468331784110/pdf/816730BRI0AGI00Box0379842B00PUBLIC0.pdf>
- World Health Organization. (2012). *Partners in life skills education: Conclusions from a United Nations inter-agency meeting*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/30.pdf
- World Health Organization. (2003). *Skills for health skills-based health education including life skills: An important component of a child-friendly/health-promoting school*. Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf
- Yankey, T., & Biswas, U. N. (2012). Life skills training as an effective intervention strategy to reduce stress among Tibetan refugee adolescents. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25(4), 514-536.
- Yuen, M., & et al. (2010). Enhancing life skills development: Chinese adolescents' perceptions. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 28(4), 295-310.

Appendix 1: A Sample of Conceptualizations of Life Skills by Organizations Implementing Girls’ Life Skills Programming

Organization	Conceptualizations of Life Skills ¹
Advancing Girls’ Education in Africa (AGE Africa)	“[Examples of] life and leadership skills [are] sexual and reproductive health, group facilitation, gender and rights, as well as self-advocacy. These soft skills are important for girls’ emotional development and are shown to keep them engaged and enrolled in secondary school.” ²
BRAC	Life skills training objectives of the STAR program are: “-Educate the learners about their rights -Creating awareness regarding burning issues (child marriage, child abuse, drugs addiction, dowry, eve teasing, rape, HIV AIDS, health puberty, menstruation -Educate learners with the social norms and values” ³
Camfed	“Camfed’s life skills program prepares students for a post-secondary life in which self-direction is essential to thrive in contexts where prospects for further education or formal employment are low. It helps children build self-awareness of their strengths while concurrently developing their critical thinking, problem-solving and communications skills. To raise learning outcomes and prepare students for the future, it encourages them to develop personal goals to create their own better future and links these to the importance of achieving success at school.” ⁴
CARE	“Activities and actions in this part of a girls’ leadership model are focused on developing the following six competencies in girls: 1. Confidence: A confident girl is aware of her opinions, goals and abilities, and acts to assert herself in order to influence and change her life and world. 2. Voice/Assertion: A girl who has found her voice is comfortable sharing her thoughts and ideas with others, and knows she has the right to do so. 3. Decision-making/Action: A girl who demonstrates sound decision-making understands that her own decisions matter for herself, for her future, and, often, for others. 4. Organization: A girl with organization skills is able to organize herself and her actions in order to accomplish a goal, and to take an idea and put it into reality. 5. Vision and ability to motivate others: A girl with a strong and clear vision and who is able to motivate others brings people together to accomplish a task. 6. Negotiation: A girl who can dialogue with others, intends to reach an understanding, resolve points of difference, or gain advantage in the outcome of a dialogue, produce an agreement over issues and bargain for herself or for collective advantage.” ⁵
Dream a Dream	“Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.” ⁶



Organization	Conceptualizations of Life Skills ¹
Glasswing	“Youth build core skills that are important for long term success, such as leadership, restorative practices, cognitive development, conflict-resolution, problem solving, and job readiness.” ⁷
Grassroot Soccer	“Grassroot Soccer defines assets based on the Population Council definition and Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory. PYD refers to intentional efforts of other youth, adults, communities, government agencies and schools to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities. An asset is a store of value—a valuable thing—that adolescents can use to reduce vulnerabilities and make the most of opportunities.” ⁸
OECD	“Global competence is the capacity to analyze global and intercultural issues critically and from multiple perspectives, to understand how differences affect perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and others, and to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with others from different backgrounds on the basis of a shared respect for human dignity.” ⁹
Plan International	“Students receive life skills training whereby they acquire a set of skills to empower them to deal with gender-based impediments to their education and self-development. The training includes building self-confidence and self-esteem, speaking out, decision-making, assertiveness, negotiation, leadership and self-control.” ¹⁰
Population Council	In the BALIKA project by Population Council, girls received “life skills training on gender rights and negotiation, critical thinking, and decision-making.” ¹¹
Room to Read	“Girls need life skills. Thinking critically, empathizing and relying on themselves help them meet day-to-day challenges and make informed decisions. ...Life skills, [include] confidence and self-esteem as well as such competencies as decision-making and perseverance.” ¹²
Save the Children	Save the Children adopts the World Health Organization's conceptualization that “life skills [are] the ability to adopt positive behaviors that enable people to successfully cope with the demands and challenges that they face with every single day.” Their manual on life skills seeks to “enable that through delivering workshops on selected topics[. Young] people develop the following life skills that could help them in everyday life: communication skills, active listening, assertiveness, presentation skills, organizational skills, planning skills, advocacy skills, resource management skills, critical-analytical thinking, conflict solving skills, managing emotions and stress, developing empathy, self-informed decision making, facilitation skills, etc.” ¹³
Standard Chartered	“Through a combination of sports and life skills training, Goal aims to empower and equip adolescent girls with the confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to be integral economic leaders in their families, communities and societies.” ¹⁴

Organization	Conceptualizations of Life Skills ¹
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	<p>“Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”</p> <p>“Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the projection of human rights, and the prevention of health and social problem.”</p> <p>“Life skills education is a holistic approach to the development of values, skills and knowledge in the learner, which assists young people to protect themselves and others in a range of risk situations. Life skills education aims to include the promotion of responsible behavior, self-confidence, equality and the prevention of prejudice and abuse.”¹⁵</p>
UNICEF	<p>“In its recent efforts to develop a guiding framework for life skills education, UNICEF has consolidated the various sets of core life skills drawn up by United Nations agencies and other organizations, such as CASEL, under three broad categories of ‘generic life skills’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive – critical thinking and problem solving skills for responsible decision making; • Personal – skills for awareness and drive and for self-management; and • Interpersonal – skills for communication, negotiation, cooperation and teamwork, and for inclusion, empathy and advocacy.”¹⁶
United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI)	<p>In UNGEI’s review of Gender and Skills Development for the 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, UNGEI cites examples of soft skills as, “timeliness, productivity, networking ability and teamwork.”¹⁷</p>
USAID and IREX	<p>“21st Century Youth Competencies [are] the knowledge and skills needed to prepare young people for economic, civic and social participation, and emotional and physical health in today’s world. Competencies facilitate a successful transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. This holistic definition considers all domains that interact as a young person develops, including the cognitive, social, psychological, and physical.”¹⁸</p>
World Bank	<p>“Life skills programs are designed to teach a broad set of social and behavioral skills—also referred to as ‘soft’ or ‘non-cognitive’ skills—that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life. Programs can build on any or all of the following skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decision-making (e.g. critical and creative thinking, and problem solving); • community living (e.g. effective communication, resisting peer pressure, building healthy relationships, and conflict resolution); • personal awareness and management (self-awareness, self-esteem, managing emotions, assertiveness, stress management, and sexual and reproductive health behaviors and attitudes).”¹⁹



Organization	Conceptualizations of Life Skills ¹
World Health Organization	<p>“Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions or actions toward others, as well as toward actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health.</p> <p>Life skills-based education may focus on peace education, human rights, citizenship education, and other social issues as well as health. Both approaches address real-life applications of essential knowledge, attitudes, and skills, and both employ interactive teaching and learning methods.”²⁰</p>

1 Other search terms included: soft skills, skills, 21st century skills, competencies; organizations were included based on clarity and availability of definitions.
 2 AGE Africa, 2017.
 3 Roy, 2013.
 4 Camfed Internal Memo August, 2017
 5 CARE, 2014.
 6 Dream a Dream, 2017.
 7 Glasswing International, 2017.
 8 Grassroot Soccer, n.d.
 9 OECD, 2016.
 10 Fancy, 2012.

11 Amin, et al., 2016.
 12 Room to Read, 2015.
 13 Smolovic, Bulut, and Vujosevic, 2011.
 14 Standard Chartered, 2014.
 15 UNESCO, 2001.
 16 UNICEF, 2012.
 17 UNGEI, 2012.
 18 This conceptualization comes from a collaboration between USAID and IREX; USAID and IREX, 2014.
 19 World Bank, 2013.
 20 World Health Organization, 2003.

SKILLS FOR A
CHANGING WORLD

LIFE SKILLS

Access a digital version and a related animation at:
<http://brook.gs/2z7Q7d5>