

Life skills in non-formal contexts for adolescent girls in developing countries

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- Independent social-science development research institute based in Bergen, Norway
- Applied research for policy influence: how to reduce poverty and improve human rights in developing countries
- Quantitative and qualitative methodologies; interdisciplinary research staff
- Expertise in poverty alleviation, improving health and education, gender, anti-corruption, natural resource management, and public financial management

Life skills for girls: New report

- Brookings-CMI collaboration
- What is the current state of non-formal life skills programs serving adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries?
- Specific research questions:
 1. What is the landscape of life skills programs for girls in developing countries?
 2. How are these programs designed?
 3. What outcomes do they intend to achieve?

Motivation for the study

- Few existing studies of what types of non-formal (education) life skills programs exist specifically for adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries
 - Due to poverty, low schooling, & discrimination, life skills programs may be particularly valuable for girls
 - Non-formal sector a key arena to reach disadvantaged girls
- Few cross-country comparative studies of these types of programs, and very few rigorous evaluations of their design and impact

Definition of “life skills”

- No universally agreed upon definition
- The combination of skills (*what one has*), knowledge (*what one knows*), and attitudes (*what one believes and values*) that constitute a set of competencies (*what one can do*) that enable youth to adapt to, function, and thrive in society
- Enable individuals to translate knowledge and attitudes into specific behaviors to cope with, navigate, and transform life’s challenges
- Competencies that transfer to other situations

Types of life skills

- Social and interpersonal - relations with other people
 - Respect for others, ability to work in teams, tolerance, cooperation, communication, conflict resolution
- Personal - management of oneself
 - Emotion management, self-regulation, perseverance, self confidence, self awareness
- Cognitive - analytical abilities
 - Problem solving, goal setting, future planning, organizational, critical and creative thinking, decision making, health skills

Methodology of the report

- Comprehensive literature review
- Data collection in Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Tanzania
 - Team knowledge; life skills programs prioritized by government and many NGO programs
- Data collection methods
 - Program mapping: 103 programs
 - Survey of beneficiaries and program administrators (779 adolescent females, and 54 project managers) in programs where skills taught via youth clubs
 - Small number of follow-up qualitative interviews (30 participants)

Literature review findings

Key findings - literature review

- Existing (few) rigorous evaluations of programs show evidence of generally positive outcomes for girl participants, including:
- Psycho-social and attitudinal outcomes (i.e. towards gender roles; self-confidence)
- Health and sexual/reproductive health
- Relationships – spouses, communities
- Prevention of early marriage
- Economic and cognitive skills

Program landscape findings

- What non-formal life skills programs are being implemented in developing countries that benefit adolescent girls?
- Who do these programs serve?
- What teaching methods do they use?

Key findings - program landscape

- Programs do not always serve the most vulnerable, nor do they exclusively target girls
 - Orphaned; disabled; school drop-out; poverty; displaced; not living with parents
- 84% serve both boys and girls, recruit all youth – use no background criteria other than age
- Many were recently in school, 40% contacted by NGO
- Survey respondents & parents are generally educated, literate, and not disabled
- Only 10% of programs say they target vulnerable youth, and just 2% target vulnerable girls

Vulnerability variation by country

- Nearly half of Lebanese survey respondents (beneficiaries) considered vulnerable
 - 39% in Ethiopia; 29% in Tanzania
- When we include citizenship status in vulnerability definition, 88% of Lebanese respondents are vulnerable
 - No change for the other countries

Key findings - program landscape

- 80% of programs use interactive, participatory teaching methods
 - Discussion, role play & drama, art, writing, sport
 - High beneficiary satisfaction with teaching methods
- 75% of programs say they use trained instructors, and train and regularly evaluate instructors
- Programs claim they have been evaluated, and that they collect participant feedback
- 70% of programs involve community members in implementation; 50% ask for parental consent

Program design findings

- What do non-formal life skills programs teach and why?
- Does political, social, and economic context shape the content of programs, and how does it influence what is taught?

Key findings - program design

- Programs report the most commonly taught skills: social & interpersonal (45%)
- Personal (20%); health (15%); cognitive (12%); vocational (10%)
- In general, program content is aligned with participant desires – with one exception
 - Ethiopian and Lebanese survey respondents identified social and interpersonal skills as most important skills learned

Country variation in skills taught & desired

- Programs teach social/interpersonal: 60% in Lebanon, 44% in Ethiopia, 33% in Tanzania
- Personal skills taught: 28% in Tanzania, 19% in Ethiopia, 12% in Lebanon
- In Tanzania, just 14% of programs report health as one of the top skills taught
 - But 46% of beneficiaries stated that health was the most important skill they learned

Program intent findings

- What is the intended outcome of non-formal life skills programs - what are programs intending to improve?

Key findings - program intent

- In addition to asking what programs teach, we asked girls for their view on impact
- Participants report greater gains in areas where they exercise high levels of personal agency, rather than in areas where there are larger structural barriers
- High anticipated impact on relationships, personal/emotional skills (confidence), health
- Low anticipated impact on future employment, marriage plans, and taking on leadership roles

Country variation in anticipated impact

- Across the 3 countries, 86% of beneficiaries see high impact on emotional management, 94% on confidence, 96% on respect for others, 86% on health choices, 82% on education choices
- Just 49% see positive impact on marriage (27% in Tanzania; 59% in Lebanon; 64% in Ethiopia)
- 73% see positive impact on future employment

Key findings - program intent

- Participants are satisfied with program content
 - 80% view training as relevant to current needs
 - 98% ranked practical usefulness as good or very good
 - 97% would recommend the training to others
- Participants prioritize attending programs
 - Few reported obstacles to attending besides lack of time

Country highlights & examples

Ethiopia

- National Framework for Life Skill Training and training manual for implementation
 - 4 categories of skills: personal, interpersonal, group, societal management
- Most programs in our sample are in urban areas, few target girls or vulnerable social groups
- Many beneficiaries currently in school, or have received education
- Health is most frequently taught skill, followed by social & interpersonal skills

Ethiopia: What the girls say

- Interviewees reported improved self-confidence, communication skills, and health knowledge
- Group discussion highly favored, especially for taboo gender and sex-related issues

Lebanon

- 2015 Life Skills and Citizenship Education - MENA regional framework targets disadvantaged adolescents, emphasizes 12 core skills
- 1/3 of programs taught more than 10 skills - mostly social & personal
- No programs reported teaching SRH, and only few report teaching general health skills
- 20% of programs targeted girls only; 60% targeted both boys and girls; more vulnerability (refugees)
- Majority of participants = recent school drop outs

Lebanon: What the girls say

- Survey respondents said social and inter-personal skills most important skills they learned
- Interviewees reported positive changes in social relations and sociability
- Many report being encouraged to take part in the training by family and/or community

Tanzania

- 2010 National Life Skills Education Framework – emphasizes self-awareness, social/relationship, and cognitive skills in a preventative framework
- All programs included both boys and girls; 52% currently attending school
- Survey respondents find health skills very valuable, but programs report low frequency of teaching

Tanzania: What the girls say

- Many interviewees equated life skills with vocational skills, saying vocational skills were very useful
- Interviewees see life skills training as influencing future employment and education opportunities
- Positive changes in social interactions

Three areas for future research

1. How and why do programs have an impact?
 - a. How do girls learn and apply skills?
 - b. How do various dimensions of program design and theory of change influence outcomes?
 - c. Is skill acquisition and application a function of skill inter-dependency?
 - d. How does context shape outcomes/impact?
2. Does altering program recruitment methods and incentives change beneficiary profile?

Questions for future research

3. What is the connection between formal schooling and non-formal programs?
 - Largest gendered gaps in access to primary & secondary school in conflict-affected/poor countries
 - Life skills programs may help girls to stay in school, re-enroll in school, and improve academic outcomes
 - “Many girls like me after attending the program have had a chance to return to education” (Lebanese respondent)
 - Girls with more formal years of schooling completed more likely to feel that life skills training will have a positive impact on their future choices, & high control over education choices

Thank you