Empowering Vulnerable Youth in Uganda

Learning from Vijana AVSI Life Skills Programme and Selected Actors

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ALM	Active Learning Methods
ANAVA	Analysis of Variance
BECCAD	Basic Education, Child Care and Adolescent Development
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
BTVET	Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training
CAT	Community Action Team
CBT	Community Based Facilitators
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DSWSA	Department of Social Work and Social Administration
ESAR	Eastern and Southern African Region
FGO	Focus Group Discussion
FHI	Family Health International
HIV	Human Immune Virus
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LST	Life Skill Training
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NDP	National Development Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSGE	National Strategy for Girls' Education
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation

PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
SCORE	Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for Valuable Children and their Families
SHEP	School Health Education Project
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UACE	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCE	Uganda Certificate of Education
UDHS	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UHRN	Uganda Harm Reduction Network
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USE	Universal Secondary Education
UYDL	Uganda Youth Development Link
VHT	Village Health Team
WHO	World Health Organisation
YLP	Youth Livelihood Programme

Acknowledgment

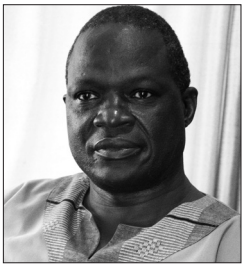
While the effort to write this book began in March 2017, the build-up activities actually started in 2016 when the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of Makerere University, supported the AVSI Foundation to evaluate its SCORE project training programme for youth in 12 of the 35 implementation districts. We are grateful for the interest and support provided by AVSI Foundation especially the funding towards the writing and publishing of this book volume. We thank the AVSI Foundation team particularly, Rita Larok (SCORE Project Chief of Party at the time) and Alfred Biribonwa Agaba (the then Technical Advisor-Family Strengthening and Child Protection) with whom we have journeyed to the finishing line. We also thank SCORE consortium partners namely, FHI 360, TPO Uganda and CARE International who together with AVSI Foundation gave us the opportunity to learn from their life skills training intervention.

We are equally grateful to the study participants particularly the youth and other stakeholders who participated in the SCORE project. Your views made it possible for us to develop a story based on the skills training intervention for the youth.

To our Research Assistants, who exhibited utmost ethical conduct, professionalism and resilience, we are very grateful.

We also thank the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of Makerere University for allowing us time to make this scholarly contribution that fits within the indigenisation agenda of social work education and practice in Uganda.

Foreword



AVSI Foundation is pleased to be associated with this publication on life skills. Adolescents and young people make up the biggest percentage of Uganda's population and as such they are an important target for us as an organization

I am glad that, through our collaboration with Makerere University, basing on our years of implementing youth life skills programmes, we now have an evidence based publication to share with the rest of the world.

I urge every reader to reflect on this work with the perception that when adults are accessible, they help the youth to live an empowered and educative journey; able to face the world on their own.

For AVSI, a strong person is a protagonist who is aware of his/her weaknesses, relationships, and emotions. AVSI's long experience with young people is demonstrated in the many change stories shared in this publication.

Thanks to all the programme participants, AVSI staff, Makerere University Research team, collaborating partners and the Government of Uganda for providing such an enabling platform to further reflect on the power of youth empowerment through life skills training. We at AVSI Foundation shall forever remain grateful to each of you for your contribution to this work.

John Makoha
AVSI Foundation – Uganda, Country Representative

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Ronald Luwangula is a Lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University. He holds a PhD in Children's Social Protection Rights from Alpen Adria University Klagenfurt, Austria (2012–2015), Master's Degree in Social Work and Human Rights from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (2009-2011) and a Bachelors of Social Work and Social Administration from Makerere University, Uganda (2003-2006). His specialisation is child protection and social protection with a gender and disability lens. He has supported the development of Child Protection Training Curriculum and Alternative Care for Children Curriculum. He is a child rights researcher and child protection trainer in Uganda and the region at large.

Dr Eddy J. Walakira is an Associate Professor of Children and Youth Studies at Makerere University (Mak). He holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Vienna Austria. Presently, he serves as the Head of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration (Mak), a role he has held for the last seven years. He teaches and researches widely on the wellbeing of

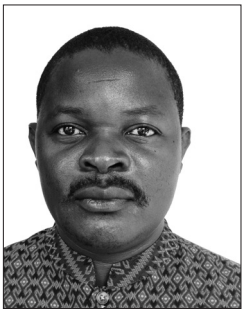
children and youth placing particular emphasis on subject areas such as; prevention of violence against children and young people, alternative care for children, livelihoods for youth and families, child labour and youth employment, sexual and reproductive health of the young people, capacity building for social service workers, and systems strengthening for effective delivery of services for vulnerable children and families. Dr Walakira's work has been instrumental in building an evidence base in the field of children and youth, shaping the development of policies and programmes related to children's welfare, and building the capacity of social service workers through development and delivery of curricula for in service workers and early career professionals. He offers advisory services to governments and civil society organisations locally and internationally. He sits on many governing boards of social services agencies and professional networks. He is also very instrumental in working towards the professionalisation of Social Work in Africa.

Rita Larok is a public health specialist with a social work background. She has specialised training and over 14 years programming experience in both development and humanitarian settings and in various fields including; youth and adolescent programmes, early childhood development and care giver programmes like parenting, quality improvement, orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), HIV/AIDS, education in emergencies, protection, livelihoods including graduation programmes vulnerable and extremely poor populations, monitoring and evaluation and programme management. Rita recently served as the Chief of

Party of the seven year USAID funded SCORE project where the Furaha Graduation and Resilience Model was premiered resulting into 83.5 per cent graduation of households and three out of four households (75%) remaining resilient three years post-graduation. Rita is currently the Director of Programmes at AVSI where she oversees over 25 different projects with an annual budget size of 12 $ million.

Fred Matovu is a Senior Lecturer of Health Economics at the School of Economics, Makerere University with over 15 years of experience and a track record of research in the areas of cost and cost-effectiveness, impact evaluations, equity analysis, poverty and welfare analysis. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of London. His recent research has focused on parenting and child welfare, saving schemes and women economic empowerment; economics of malaria, cost and cost-effectiveness of interventions. He has served in a number of professional capacities including coordinator of research and outreach at the Makerere University College of Business and Management Sciences, Social Policy Advisor to the Ugandan Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and member of the Uganda Taskforce on Social Protection. He has conducted research and consultancies for governments, NGOs and UN agencies including UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, MVI/PATH, WHO, DfID and the World Bank and conducted collaborative research in Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. He has published in peer-reviewed journals including *Malaria Journal, Bulletin of the WHO, PlosOne, Health Policy and Planning, Parasites and Vectors,* and authored book

chapters. He is a current member of the RBM Partnership in Uganda, the African Economic Research consortium (AERC), International Health Economics Association (iHEA), Uganda Economics Association and the scientific committee and editorial board of the Journal of African Health Economics and Policy.



Alfred B. Agaba is a Child Protection, Education and Family Strengthening specialist currently working as the Programme Manager – Education Cannot wait & Ending Violence Against Children projects with AVSI Foundation in Uganda. In the last 17 years, Alfred has specialised in training and programming experience in children and youth development, continuous professional development training for teachers, parenting skills improvement for care-takers of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), capacity building for social workers, education programming in emergency contexts and project Monitoring and Evaluation. Alfred recently served as the Technical Advisor-Child Protection and Family Strengthening of the seven year USAID funded SCORE project implemented in a consortium led by AVSI Foundation. Alfred holds a Bachelor of Arts with Education Honours (2000), a Master of Arts in Economics (2009) with a bias in Managerial Economics, both from Makerere University and a postgraduate diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation from Uganda Management Institute (2015/2016).

Fred Kasalirwe is an Economist with over six years' experience in social and economic development research and training, with great research and evaluation interests in Economic and Health

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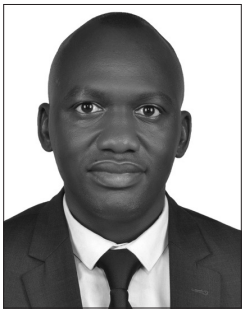
John Paul Nyeko is a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, with a computer science background. He has experience in programming, early childhood development, protection, livelihoods, youth and adolescent programme, and graduation programming for both poor and extremely poor population. John Paul holds a degree in Bachelor of Science in computer science (Makerere University), Masters in Business Administration-Project Planning (Makerere University Business School), and a postgraduate diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation from Uganda Management Institute.



John Paul most recently served as a Strategic information Advisor for a just concluded seven year USAID funded SCORE project which reached over 25,000 OVC families in 35 districts of Uganda (graduating over 80% of the families). He currently serves with AVSI foundation Uganda as a Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor for another seven year USAID/FFP funded Activity "Graduating to Resilience Activity," targeting extremely poor refugees and host community in Kamwenge District, Uganda.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

Life skills training for young people is a matter of global concern today. This is in recognition of the contemporary challenges young people face, largely attributable to lack of life skills. As a matter of necessity, creating opportunities for young people to acquire life skills has become a global trend.

The report by Delors et al,. (1996) to UNESCO in 1996 titled *Learning: The treasure within* in many ways set in motion the purpose, justification and agenda for life skills training. The report identifies the essential functions of life skills for lifelong learning through the four pillars of education namely: "Learning to know;" "Learning to do," "Learning to live together" and "Learning to be." These pillars carry a strong message and implication for life skills training. "Learning to know" involves "combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects; and learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life" (p. 37). "Learning to do" is about "acquiring

occupational skills and competence to deal with many situations and working in teams" (p. 37). Delors et al. (1996) maintain that "Learning to do" takes into perspective "the context of young peoples' various social and work experiences which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work" (p. 37). "Learning to live together" entails "developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence — carrying out joint activities and learning to manage conflicts — in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace" (p. 37). Lastly, "Learning to be" focuses on getting better at developing "one's personality and being able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility" while recognising and according due regard to all "aspects of a person's potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills" (p. 37).

In a similar accord, the Education for All Agenda laid emphasis on life skills. Goal 3 of this global agenda was geared towards promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults (UNESCO, 2015). This goal was premised on the view that "the development of a person is a complicated thing, one that instruction cannot accomplish alone" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 2). Rather, it calls for skills that a person — child or youth — needs throughout his/her life to reach his/her full potential. It is such skills that facilitate a person to make relevant use of what he or she has learnt in school and adapt quickly in a rapidly changing world (Ibid).

This lady was trained in life skills that helped her to sustain her pregnancy. At age 17, she gave birth to a healthy child.

Life skills have been prioritised in the post-2015 International Education Agenda. In its position on the agenda, UNESCO underlines what it defines as "a clear consensus on the need for a clearly defined, balanced and holistic education agenda…" (UNESCO, 2013, p. 5). UNESCO cites lifelong learning as one of the imperatives and a central principle for the agenda. Lifelong learning provides flexible life-long and life-wide learning opportunities through formal, non-formal and informal pathways. Thematic priority (d) of UNESCO's concept note on the agenda focuses on "Increasing emphasis on skills for life and for work" (UNESCO, 2013, p. 7). Moreover, UNESCO's emphasis on life skills within the agenda is not baseless. Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) present life skills as important building blocks for a dynamic citizen, capable of coping with future challenges, and surviving well. UNICEF (2015, p. 1) adduces evidence that globally, "life skills play a fundamental role in the development of competences needed not only for better learning, but also for positive self-empowerment, active citizenship, and enhanced employability." Yet in crisis contexts, life skills "increase the resilience of children and youth, and constitute a key pillar for recovery in disrupted societies" (Ibid, 2015, p. 25).

UNICEF (2015) contends that in circumstances and contexts where a country or region scores poorly in learning achievements/outcomes, and where the education systems struggle to prepare youth for integration into complex labour markets, life skills training becomes very important. Uganda is not exceptional of these circumstances. Moreover, even as Uganda's National Youth Policy 2016 envisions an empowered, industrious, inclusive and prosperous youth population (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development Uganda, 2016), it is rather vague on life skills training for young people under the set objectives and the

attendant strategies. Banks and Sulaiman (2012) rightly posit that Uganda's youth are not short of entrepreneurial potential and capacity to improve their own and their communities' lives and circumstances. In the event that such potential is harnessed, the youths can be a great asset to the country. However, Uganda's youths represent both a problem and a promise (Ibid), the distinguishing variable being life skills competencies expected to bridge the gap between basic functioning and capabilities (Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma, 2017).

It is upon such a background that this book is published not only to present ongoing life skills interventions in Uganda but also make a case for them. The arguments advanced are premised on or even support the view that Uganda's young people are yet to reach optimal life skills levels and that many of the challenges they face are linked to poor life skills. Thus, with requisite life skills, they can prevent and/or respond appropriately to the challenges.

The national context

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world. According to the 2014 National Housing and Population Census, young people aged 10–24 comprise 34.8 per cent of the population yet if scaled up to age 29, the proportion rises to 42.0 per cent (UBOS, 2016). Young people comprise a large proportion of Uganda's potential labour force. The National Development Plan (NDP II 2015/16-2019/20) shows that youth comprise 57 per cent of the country's labour force (Republic of Uganda, 2015). Unfortunately, the majority of youth represent a vulnerable population given the multidimensional problems and challenges they face, including unemployment and poverty, poor attitude towards work, dependence on parents and relatives, and lack of critical skills needed in a competitive labour market. Other

challenges include early marriages and pregnancies, peer influence and other social pressures, crime, and substance and drug abuse as a cause but also a coping strategy for lack of employment. They are further affected by HIV/AIDS, other STIs, and lack of life skills needed to resist such pressures and practice safe behaviour (NDP-II, 2015 Parag. 246).

The Government of Uganda, through the National Development Plan (NDP) II 2015/16–2019/20 aims to achieve middle income status by 2020 (Republic of Uganda, 2015) "through strengthening the country's competitiveness for sustainable wealth creation, employment and inclusive growth." This goal may not be achieved by the proposed date. That probability notwithstanding, the youth who comprise the bulk of the country's labour force are expected to contribute towards this goal. However, owing to lack of broad ranging technical and social skills, their involvement would be minimal or negative. Equipping young people with life skills is not specifically highlighted in the NDP II. However, focus is placed on developing Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET). Life skills are much more than BTVET skills as we show in chapter three. The NDP II acknowledges that skilling the human resources of a country is critical to driving social and economic development. It is noted that the challenges to social and economic transformation rotate around "inadequate skills mix to support increased production and expansion; poor work readiness of many young people leaving formal secondary and tertiary education and entering the labour market for the first time; inadequate linkages between institutional (employers) and workplace learning; lack of basic numeracy, literacy, and entry-level skills and work-based training…" (Ibid, p. 200). The emphasis on skilling young people

ought to give more visibility to life skills as an integral component of business, technical and work place skills.

Equipping young people with life skills fits well with the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals that place emphasis on "leaving no one behind." Equipping young people with a comprehensive skills set potentially enables them to contribute meaningfully towards activities that enable graduation out of poverty in all its forms, and participating in full and productive employment, and decent work.

One of the efforts the government has pursued aimed at empowering the youth right from childhood, is the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE). As a result, enrolment increased tremendously. For instance, primary school enrolment increased from 7.3 million pupils in 2002 to 8.8 million in 2014, with a net enrolment ratio of 97 percent in 2014 (Walakira et al., 2016). Challenges nonetheless remain. Moreover, fewer girls than boys complete primary education and few transition to secondary school as a result. For example, for the years 2002, 2006 and 2010, the primary seven completion rates for boys were 58.8 per cent, 55 per cent, and 56 per cent respectively; while the girls recorded 41 per cent, 42 per cent and 51 per cent completion rates respectively. In terms of cohort analysis, only about 60 per cent of the pupils enrolled in primary one were able to go up to primary five, while only 40 per cent were able to continue up to primary seven on time (Ibid). Students are lost in the system due to school dropout or repetition. The repetition rate in primary was as high as 11.7 per cent in 2009 but reduced slightly to 10.3 per cent in 2013 (NDP II, 2015, p. xxii). Repetition demoralises learners and contributes to school dropouts. Walakira et al. (2016)

further note that although transition to secondary education (that is senior one) is remarkably higher at 70 per cent, just 40 per cent are able to complete secondary school (senior four).

While there is now near gender parity (50.5% girls and 49.5% boys) in primary education, the gap is pronounced at BTVET level. Under the government BTVET skilling programme, government reports that during the implementation phase of NDP I, a 73 per cent increase in enrolment was registered between 2009 and 2013, and the majority were male (66% male and 34% female) (NDP II, 2015, xxii). The predominant emphasis placed on the hard skills with no specific consideration of soft skills (part of life skills) remains a key gap in the skilling of the youth. The soft skills enable the youth relate, communicate, interact with others, get and retain jobs, make the right decisions, work in teams, learn resilience and cope with challenges.

In the health sector, amidst progress registered in maternal and child health, teenage pregnancy remains unacceptably high. The Uganda Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2016 shows that the rate has stagnated at 25 per cent (one in every four adolescent girls aged 15–19 is affected) (UBOS and ICF International, 2017). Teenage pregnancy is a major cause of school dropouts. Many girls who get pregnant are married off against their will and many do not receive any further formal education. Teenage pregnancy is one of the key reasons why girls need to be empowered with life skills. Life skills build young people's capacity to be assertive, and improve decision making when it comes to situations culminating in sexual activities. Thus, in light of the many risks and vulnerabilities young people face, navigating their life trajectory demands a range of skills to prepare them for life's challenges. Life skills further enable them to influence the

environment within which they live, thereby minimising risks to their wellbeing. However, life skills training in Uganda is still limited and misunderstood. Within the school system, young people are preoccupied with academic skills. The youth out of school are trapped in the overarching desire to get quick money believing that possession of money is equivalent to success. They are not helped to understand the principles and building blocks for success and what success means.

Why this book?

The environment in which young people operate is increasingly dynamic, complex and fragile. The risks and vulnerabilities they are exposed to are many. They have to cope with expectations from family, friends, peers, and society at large. Yet there are youth who are growing out of the family environment for a number of reasons such as abuse, orphan-hood, trafficking, and the search for education. Some do not get an opportunity to get good parenting. Some youth growing up under the care of parents also do not get quality time of interaction with their parents for a number of reasons. Increasingly, parents get trapped with busy work schedules while others simply lack the knowledge and skills to nurture their young ones. Electronic and social media has affected the behaviour of young people, sometimes in negative ways, particularly in the absence of parental guidance. For example where media content is not regulated in relation to the age of the child or young person, it may open up the mind of the recipients in ways that can be very harmful for their emotional, physical and social wellbeing. The different settings therefore in which young people grow up require active involvement of their parents or adults to ensure that they are guided and protected from harmful situations, and also enabled to cope in such situations. This involvement is however

very limited and as a result, we are witnessing a generation of young people that has not profited from family life and guidance. Young people face the challenge of understanding the realities in their environments and not imagining that 'television lifestyles' always present the reality in their circumstances.

Several service providers, predominantly in the civil society sector, have designed and implemented training programmes to address life skills as an area of need. Some integrate life skills programmes in their broader programmes. However, there is still limited evidence that sheds light on life skills training for young people in Uganda. Available literature is largely organisation-based, involving profiling of individuals within the life skills training programmes. Yet as the providers increasingly appreciate the essence of investing in life skills training, there is need for evidence based research to support this endeavour.

It is also common practice for NGOs to implement programmes, conduct evaluations and document key lessons but make no step to publish the findings. This limits the sharing of learning, unlearning and relearning with other actors in the same field. It also minimises chances for feedback and positive criticism. This book makes an effort to bridge the gap in particular by documenting a rigorously evaluated Life Skills Model by AVSI Foundation. This will give an opportunity to the AVSI family and other service providers working with the youth to learn lessons in relation to design and delivery of life skills training programmes.

This book also comes at a time when life skills are receiving minimal recognition and funding especially from the government of Uganda and development partners. The focus has been placed more on hard-skills (technical and vocational) with limited integration of soft-skills in the training curriculum. This book

therefore in part aims to galvanise support towards life skills training programmes aware that hard-skills may not help young people achieve much if not balanced with soft-skills.

Target audience

Various individuals and institutions are expected to benefit from this book. These include schools, parents, youth, civil society organisations, policy makers, government agencies and departments working with youth, and academia.

Educationists and trainers have for long placed emphasis on learners achieving academic grades and not the life skills that will eventually help them make use of those academic grades. As such, they have continued to produce graduates at various levels without adequate preparation to succeed in the various settings where they are placed. Many fail to succeed academically, fail to get employed or be in successful self-employment get married off at a young age while others are unable to exercise self-restraint or protect themselves from risky sexual behaviour that predisposes them to HIV infection. This book offers an opportunity to learn more about life skills, their contribution to young people's successful transition to adulthood, building of resilience and helping young people to succeed in life.

The book can serve as a source of material for developing curricula at various levels for skilling young people. The lack of comprehensive scholarly material based on empirical data on life skills training makes this volume timely. Researchers would in particular be challenged to explore new areas of research and contribute to both programming and theorisation.

Given the variation in the understanding of life skills, the book offers an opportunity to all actors to develop a shared understanding of the concept, particularly from the perspective

of key actors in the south. While many descriptions of life skills are given in literature, how life skills are eventually identified and considered for delivery in practical settings presents yet an interesting setting for interrogation and learning.

Policy makers form one of the constituencies targeted by this book. In Uganda as in many other countries, policy makers quite often define priorities, guide budget allocations and set directions for issues of national importance. This is an opportunity to advance the case for accelerated integration of life skills training in the conventional youth skilling programmes. With this, policy makers and programmers ought to consider increasing resource allocation to support enhanced skilling of youth. This would be in line with the strategy to achieve overall national development as well as promoting national cohesion especially when young people are at work instead of being idle and a potential source of civil unrest.

Approach to developing the book

The development of this book emerged from Makerere University, Department of Social Work and Social Administration's (DSWSA) longstanding collaborative work with AVSI Foundation Uganda. Between May and August 2016, AVSI Foundation commissioned a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vijana life skills training programme that AVSI and partners implemented under the Sustainable Comprehensive Responses (SCORE) for vulnerable children and their families supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Makerere University supported AVSI Foundation to conduct the evaluation. Following the successful completion of the study in December 2016, AVSI and Makerere University needed to deepen and broaden the understanding of issues of youth life skills training delivery among

programme implementers, people involved in policy formulation and those in academia.

With the aim to contribute towards building evidence on effective training programmes in Uganda, AVSI and Makerere University invested in understanding the training programmes and models by AVSI and other agencies contributing to this field. This meant transcending the findings of the evaluation done in preparation for publication. Additional data was collected and it served the following purposes: contextualising youth life skills training in Uganda in general; generating an understanding of how youth life skills is conceptualised; how it is commonly developed among the youth; and understanding the youth life skills issues that need particular training focus to make training more effective for youth of various age groups. A formidable team was composed, comprising of experts from the academia (Makerere University, Department of Social Work and Social Administration) and practice (AVSI Foundation in Uganda). A blend of and reinforcement between the academic and technical practice expertise made it possible to produce this piece of work.

Data used

This volume is enriched by data from primary and secondary sources. Data from primary sources feeds into two parts of this book. The first part which mainly covers conceptual issues about life skills and on-going programmes within the country (chapters 2 to 5) has benefited from qualitative primary data and an extensive review of literature from various sources. Primary data for this part of the book was collected from key stakeholders working with the youth and various opinion leaders on the subject. The key stakeholders who doubled as key informants were identified from the agencies that play a leading role in working with the youth or

designing skills training programmes for the youth. Though most agencies work countrywide, they are headquartered in Kampala and Wakiso districts. Fieldwork took place between February and May 2017. Participants were required to give their insights on issues such as how they conceptualise life skills, the key challenges youth face in Uganda, the skills present day youth need, how well equipped young people are to succeed in life, knowledge of ongoing life skills programmes, underlying theories of change, achievements, and lessons learnt.

Up to 20 key informants from CSOs implementing life skills programmes, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and Sports, teachers, education experts and senior educationists were interviewed.

Secondary data review comprised sorting and review of scientific journal articles and documents from various agencies including, but not limited to: The Ministry of Education and Sports Life skills curriculum for primary school teachers in Uganda (2011), Ministry of Education and Sports National Strategy for Girls' Education (NSGE) in Uganda (2014–2019), Ministry of Education and Sports Skilling Uganda BTVET Strategic Plan 2012/13 – 2021/22, BRAC's Business Start Up and Development Trainee's Handbook 2016, BRAC's Life Skills Information Guide for Adolescents (2013), The Adolescent Girls Vulnerability Index Guiding Strategic Investment in Uganda by Population Council, Inc (2013), BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents Life Skills Training Guide for the Mentors (n.d), BRAC's Youth Watch (2012) on Harnessing Youth Potential in Uganda, Programme Document for Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development's (MGLSD) Youth Livelihood Programme (2013),

MGLSD's Uganda National Youth Policy 2016 and the attendant National Youth Action Plan, 2016.

Rigorous evaluative methods were used to determine the impact of the AVSI Vijana life skills training programme. The detailed methodology is described in chapter 7. However for a brief mention here, the study covered 10 districts (out of 35 SCORE project districts) selected from all the major regions where the intervention was implemented. The study used a comparison-control group design with a sample of 349 youth drawn for the intervention group and 364 youth from the control group. In general, the study was cross-sectional and applied a mixed methods design involving use of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data was collected from project implementation partners (IPs), youth beneficiaries and selected care givers.

Organisation of the book

This book aims to contribute towards building evidence on effective youth life skills training programmes in Uganda, models used, and lessons they offer. It has eight chapters.

Chapter 1 is the introduction, which provides the background to the development of the publication, why it has been written, the approach to its development, methodology used to gather empirical data, its scope and structure, and the target audience.

Chapter 2 portrays the situation of youth in Uganda, discussing their challenges, which we view as being a function of inadequacy of life skills.

Chapter 3 focuses on the conceptualisation of life skills, with international, conventional and contextual definitions provided. It appreciates that commonly, definitions of concepts by international organisations and scholars from the north have always been taken for granted without deeply interrogating them, let alone sourcing

contextual definitions, and partly addresses this omission. It highlights the narrower and broader conceptualisations of life skills and discerns two typologies to conceptualising life skills, according to the purpose they serve and the skills set covered. It further documents the evolving focus of life skills, looking beyond the challenges of HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse, to embrace skills that enhance survival.

Chapter 4 presents the approaches to life skills training, acknowledging that there is no single self-sufficient approach to delivering a skills programme. The various approaches tried, tested and documented by different programmes and thus presented in this volume include peer-to-peer, group, infusion/integration of training in mainstream education curriculum, infusion/integration training in other development programmes, and community-based approach. The chapter highlights the settings in which these approaches are used.

Chapter 5 details a Vijana life skills training programme implemented by AVSI Foundation under the Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for vulnerable children and their families (SCORE) project. It highlights the project conceptualisation, design, implementation process, modifications in design/methodology, challenges experienced and how they were addressed or failed to be addressed, and the lessons learnt.

Chapter 6 highlights the outcomes of AVSI Foundation's training in the intervention districts. The outcomes are presented along the four skills sets that AVSI focused on, that is, coping and self-management skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking and decision-making, and communication. The most significant changes are captured.

Chapter 7 provides insight into the existing initiatives in support of life skills training in Uganda. Interventions by both state and non-state actors are presented, including their aims, focus, strengths and weakness.

Chapter 8 winds the book up with the conclusion and emerging lessons.

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Chapter Two

The Youth in Uganda

Introduction

In this chapter, we present the situation of youth in Uganda, demonstrating their competences and the challenges they face. The challenges are presented as a reflection of a life skills deficit, which can therefore be addressed once youths acquire and master life skills. We thus link the challenges to the need for life skills training. The chapter suggests that many young people could be ill-equipped to succeed in life on account of inadequacies in life skills competences. The data is based on the evaluation of AVSI's life skills programmes as well as additional primary data collected in and around Kampala from a range of experts. Data from secondary sources also complements the primary data.

Youth as a resource

The youth all over the world are a resource, who can contribute to solving substantive societal issues (Glen, 2015). The challenge, however, lies in denying them the opportunity even when they are appreciated as a resource (Ibid; Restless Development (n.d)). Glen contends that young people should be included in solving issues

of substance by anyone who appreciates that young people are the leaders of the future, who do not blindly accept the status quo but strive to contribute towards societal change and betterment. They are energetic and ambitious. Elsewhere, it is argued, unveiling the competences of young people basically requires giving them career support, which would include giving them information about study options, the job market, contacts with employers and employees; talks from and visits to apprenticeships and other providers, colleges and universities and experience of the work place.

This participant is happy to transform her life through tailoring.

In Uganda, young people are increasingly identified as energetic and enthusiastic and a strong asset for development (Restless Development (n.d)). Youth also easily take up development initiatives once the barriers to their participation in development

such as access to financial resources are addressed, (Plan International, 2017).

Challenges young people face in Uganda

Young people face a myriad of challenges, which are a reflection of the lack of skills that they need to shape their environment and navigate their lives. The problems range from alcoholism, peer pressure, drug and substance abuse, unemployment, dropping out of school, gang activities, addiction to gambling and betting, challenges of founding and maintaining a family, unwanted or teenage pregnancies, absence of good role models, peer and societal pressure, and unfiltered and massive electronic and non-electronic information.

Alcoholism, drug and other substance abuse

Alcohol use among young people in Uganda is unprecedentedly high (Swahn, Palmier, and Kasirye, 2013). Among young people in the age category of 15–16 and 13–14, Walakira et al. (2016) estimate alcohol consumption at 15 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The percentage is likely higher among older youths. Moreover, there are many reasons to be concerned about the alcohol use among youth. Various authors report an association between alcohol abuse and sexually transmitted infections with the former very likely to precipitate and reinforce sexual risk-taking (Zablotska et al., 2006; Swahn et al., 2013). Swahn et al. (2013) underline an association between alcohol use and alcohol addiction, other drug use, unintentional injuries, physical fighting, criminal activity, suicidal ideation and attempts, and road traffic accidents. In a study of suicidal ideation and associated factors among school-going adolescents in rural Uganda, Rudatsikira et al. (2017) found that due to alcohol consumption among other

factors, 21.6 per cent of the study participants, 21.3 per cent males and 23.5 per cent females, had seriously considered committing suicide within the past 12 months. Similarly, Zablotska et al. (2007) in a study of 3,422 women aged 15–24 from the Rakai cohort (in Uganda) examined the association between self-reported alcohol use before sex, physical violence/sexual coercion in the past and the prevalence of HIV. They concluded that alcohol use before sex was associated with a higher risk of physical violence/sexual coercion and HIV prevalence. Elsewhere, the International Youth Foundation (2011) identified that alcohol use is associated with unemployment because youths involved in alcohol use engage in high-risk behaviour and are thus unable to keep jobs.

Alongside alcohol use is drug and other substance abuse. Walakira et al. (2016) link drug and other substance abuse to mental illness, with children and youths affected reasonably. They estimated that drug and substance abuse accounts for nearly 18 per cent of people with mental illness. The Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN) (2013) is in agreement, contending that the problem is big. UHRN is a community-based organisation established in 2011 and founded by former drug users. Schools are often identified as the most risky settings serving as a hatching ground for the vice, with the practice reportedly on the rise (Nabatanzi, 2013). Of concern, Uganda has for long operated without special legislative provisions on: a) treatment and rehabilitation for people with substance use disorders, and b) compulsory treatment for people with substance use disorders (WHO, 2010).

Some studies have shown a positive relationship between life skills intervention programmes targeting youth either before or during junior high school and prevention of alcohol, substance and other drug use during high school. As a case in point, Botvin

and Kantor (2000) illustrate how the Life Skills Training (LST) programme designed as a school-based primary prevention intervention targeting a specific set of risk factors for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use in the United States of America proved to be effective. Students that received the life skills training are said to have reported minimal incidences of smoking cigarettes and other drugs and drinking alcohol. The LST programme conducted a six-year randomised trial involving nearly 6,000 students from 56 public schools in New York State that were randomly assigned to prevention and control conditions. The students in the prevention condition received the LST programme in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. Specially trained classroom teachers taught the prevention programme.

Such evidence can be motivational for actors working with young people who share similar risks.

Youth unemployment

The International Labour Organisation & Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2013) put youth (national definition, 18–30 years) unemployment at 64 per cent. This represents an improvement from 78 per cent by 2011 according to NDP-II (Republic of Uganda, 2015). By all indications, youth unemployment in Uganda is much higher than the global rate estimated at 13.1 per cent and Africa's youth unemployment rate of 51 per cent cited in NDP-II Para 339 (Ibid, 2015). Ahaibwe and Mbowa's (2014) description of youth unemployment as a policy challenge sheds light to the necessity to place youth life skills training into perspective on the policy agenda. In terms of rural-urban and gender disaggregation, the duo observes that the urban youths are thrice as likely to be unemployed compared to rural youths while the male youth are twice as likely to be employed compared to

their female counterparts. This bears implications for exposure of female youths to risk and risky behaviour such as desperate means of survival including commercial sex, being forced to give sex to acquire a job, etc.

Attainment of education is often positively associated with prospects for employment. However, there are concerns that young people that have some education commonly exhibit skills irrelevant to current demand in the labour market (UBOS, 2016, p. 40). This increases unemployment and underemployment (Ibid; Ahaibwe and Mbowa, 2014). Attainment of higher education is associated with biases against informal jobs in favour of wage-paying formal jobs that are critically hard to secure (Ahaibwe and Mbowa, 2014). At play is young people's lack of life skills. Otherwise, with life skills competence, it would be expected that regardless of the education level, one can do any available legal and acceptable job and use it to attain the level he or she deems fit. But without the requisite life skills such as sound decision making, creative thinking and critical thinking (WHO, 2003), young people in Uganda remain trapped in unemployment for months, a year and years without rethinking their positions on available jobs or starting as small entrepreneurs.

Youth unemployment in Uganda takes different dimensions including among others: giving up on the search for jobs, returning to school as an alternative to unemployment, heavy underutilisation of labour potential and competences, and vulnerable employment characterised by low pay and job insecurity among youths unable to negotiate open/formal employment (Ahaibwe and Mbowa, 2014; International Youth Foundation, 2011). Indeed it is typical for many youths in Uganda including graduates to rather get formal employment; an office where he/she earns UGX 400,000

(USD 110) per month for three years before any salary increment than starting an informal small enterprise that requires initial capital of UGX 400,000 but with potential to grow and earn him a profit margin of UGX 1,000,000 (USD 274) per month in 3 years. This informal enterprise will also be employing other young people, with a possibility of starting new branches and expanding further. For young people, such is for the "un- or less-educated." The educated in their opinion, "should" be in offices.

Moreover, the burden of unemployment does not only manifest in terms of economic and social insecurity but many other forms. For instance, youth unemployment is associated with the emotional and psychosocial effects of eroded self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, feeling wasted, and so much more. Low bargaining position, cross-generation sex and other undue realities are as well underpinned by economic vulnerability attributed to unemployment. Therefore, if youths are not equipped with life skills that enable them become employable they are more likely to sink deeper into vulnerability. Some resort to self-destructive behaviour.

Some study participants noted that understanding the causes of youth unemployment and planning any interventions ought not to overlook the lack of life skills among the young people:

> There has been a tendency to place life skills at the periphery of humanity. Moreover, this has turned out to be very consequential. It has led to a loss of fundamental things that employers are looking out for among employees. Life skills help to bridge the gap [and also] convert the "professionally" skilled into the kind of employees that entrepreneurs are looking for — people with positive attitude, critical thinkers, critical decision makers, people with respect for self and others, etc. So the skills make these young people employable (KII - Enterprise Uganda).

> (…) also young people lack skills which make them employable and these are the soft skills. They lack necessary skills that would help them to be employable. For they are poor time managers, they have a poor attitude towards work, they do not treat people well because they have not been oriented towards that, they do not have confidence in what they are doing… so they are not exposed to soft skills... (KII - PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

The following excerpt from Uganda's NDP-II (p. 7) is consistent with the above submissions:

> Uganda's labour market continues to face a shortage of requisite skills, with only few people being in possession of some form of tertiary education qualification. There was a mismatch between the curriculum at the tertiary institutions and the labour market requirements, which explains the high graduate unemployment rates on Uganda's labour market (Republic of Uganda, 2015).

The preceding observation corroborates a situation where many young people lament the situation in which they find themselves such as unemployment. Some perceive themselves as inferior, and some graduates spend years unemployed and unable to start an enterprise of their own. Life skills are critically central to unlocking these barriers and wrong perceptions.

Teenage pregnancy

According to the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS), teenage pregnancy (considering age bracket 15–19) stands at 25 per cent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS]; ICF, 2017). This marks a rise from 24 per cent in 2011, according to the 2011 UDHS (Uganda Bureau of Statistics; ICF, 2012). The 2016 UDHS notes with dismay that "the proportion of women age 15–19 who have begun childbearing rises rapidly with age, from 3 per cent among women aged 15 to 22 per cent among women aged 17 and 54 per cent among women aged 19." In terms of the

rural-urban dichotomy, higher rates of adolescent childbearing in rural Uganda (27%) than in urban areas (19%) are cited (Ibid, 2017). Early childbearing (teenage pregnancy) is associated with lower education levels and low social economic status. The UDHS 2016 cites 35 per cent teenage pregnancy prevalence among teenagers aged 15–19 with no education compared to 11 per cent among those with more than secondary education. While among the teenagers in the lowest wealth quintile, the rate stands at 34 per cent compared to 15 per cent among teenagers in the highest wealth quintile (UBOS and ICF, 2017).

An analysis of the above figures raises a question of whether urban youths, educated youths and youths in the highest wealth quintile could be having better exposure to life skills than their respective counterparts in rural areas, with low education levels, and from poor economic backgrounds. This may (not) be the case. In some cases, it is the question of difference in the environment in which the different categories of youths thrive. For instance in rural areas, once a girl or boy drops out of school for any reason such as lack of money but also lack of life skills, there is not much left but to get married. At times they even face pressure from parents and clan members with interest in bride wealth for the case of girls. The case is different for the urban youths and youths from affluent backgrounds. That said, the bottom-line is that teenage pregnancy knows no boundaries of level of education, level of affluence or geographical location. Teenagers with more than secondary education or from the highest wealth quintile but without the necessary life skills can be more susceptible to teenage pregnancy than their counterparts with lower education or from poor economic backgrounds with better life skills. Essentially, irrespective of one's background, all young people need life skills

training, otherwise the country should be ready to contend with teenage pregnancy, perhaps even at a growing rate especially as society becomes more promiscuous amid diminishing control of children.

Dropping out of school

Dropping out of school by girls and boys occurs in Uganda even when the affected youths consider school as one of the institutions dear to them. The proportion of children and youths that drop out of school is not negligible. According to the National Education Profile 2014 Update by the World Bank (2014), Uganda in 2014 had a total of 9,428,000 pupils enrolled in primary and secondary education. This update however reveals that approximately 4 per cent of a cohort of youth aged 15–24 in Uganda have no formal education and 52 per cent of youth have attained utmost incomplete primary education. By aggregation, in total 57 per cent of 15–24 year olds have not completed primary education in Uganda. This reference further highlights that for those that make it to secondary, 28 per cent do not complete.

While economic factors more often than not stand at the centre of children and youths dropping out of school, there are a myriad of life skills-related factors that explain school dropout among youths. For instance, a report by the International Center for Research on Women (2015) documenting the reasons for school dropout in Uganda indicates that pregnancy (accounting for 13.1 per cent of school dropout) was second to economic factors in explaining dropping out of school by girls aged 14–18 in West Nile, Uganda. Many other factors fronted as the cause of school dropout are symptomatic of lack of life skills. For instance, some children and youths drop out of school due to recurrent expulsions emanating from, among others, bullying, alcohol,

drug and substance abuse, physical abuse by fellow learners, and humiliation by school staff. While these emerge as the manifest factors, the latent cause is by and large a deficit in life skills.

Dropping out of school is also seen as robbing children and youth of an avenue for accessing useful life skills information to help them to be better people. While their counterparts in school could benefit from the integration of life skills in mainstream education, notwithstanding the acknowledged integral gaps, those out of school lack such opportunity.

Dropping out of school associated with teenage pregnancy exposes the victims to social isolation. Just as life skills are necessary to prevent school dropout and teenage pregnancy, dealing with the consequences of the same such as social isolation calls for possession of life skills (Population Council, 2010). Eggert, Nicholas and Owen (1995) thus posit that youths on a potential school dropout trajectory can very much be salvaged if reached with life skills, which can support them to transform risk into resilience.

Perpetration of violence

A wealth of literature justifiably presents youths as victims of violence in different settings (WHO, 2016; Government of Canada, 2015; Alder, 1991; Mutto, Lett, Lawoko, Nansamba, and Svanstrom, 2011; UNICEF Uganda, 2010; Walakira, Ddumba-Nyanzi, Lishan, and Baizerman, 2014; Wandera et al., 2017; Devries et al., 2013; Alder and Sandor (n.d)). The WHO (2017), for instance, identifies homicide as the fourth leading cause of death among youth aged 10–29 years. Mutto et al. (2011) in their cross sectional analysis of trauma registry data from accident and emergency units of five regional referral hospitals in Uganda, reviewed data that had been prospectively

collected from all patients accessing injury care at the five sites between July 2004 and June 2005. Their analysis of youth records revealed that intentional injuries among youth victims, and in particular school-age males, were common across the five regions. These constituted 7.3 per cent of their injury burden, with males being dominant. They report that these occurred at home, on roads, and in public places. The injuries were attributed to blunt force, stabs/cuts, and gunshots in general, but with variations in causes depending on age. The intentional injuries manifested on the head, neck, and face of victims.

Devries et al. (2013) in a survey of 3,706 students and 577 school staff members in Luwero district in Uganda, found that 93.3 per cent of boys and 94.2 per cent of girls attending primary self-reported having undergone the experience of physical violence from a school staff member. In a study of street children's exposure to and responses to violence in 21 major towns in Uganda, Walakira et al. (2014) studied 668 children (60.2% boys and 39.8% girls) with a mean age of 14.2. They found that 76 per cent of all children had experienced at least one form of physical violence, 61 per cent sexual violence and 89 per cent emotional violence in the 12 months that preceded the survey.

The above notwithstanding, without life skills among youths, some easily perpetrate violence. According to the Global Status Report on Violence Prevention (WHO, 2014), the number of homicides registered in Uganda is unacceptably high. The report puts the numbers at 2753, 2669, and 1761 in 2009, 2010 and 2013 respectively. Whilst these figures are national, and therefore contributed to by youth and non-youth population segments, WHO (2002) reports that youth are involved in perpetrating homicides. Wandera et al. (2017) in their study of violence

against children perpetrated by peers in Uganda that involved a cross-section of 3,706 primary students in 42 Ugandan primary schools, found out that up to 29 per cent and 34 per cent had, respectively, ever been victimised by physical and emotional violence perpetrated by their peers.

Yao et al (2012) studied 457 urban youth aged 14–24 years, living on the streets or in the slums and who were participating in a Uganda Youth Development Link drop-in centre for disadvantaged street youth. The study aimed at determining the prevalence of violence involving weapons in a convenience sample of service-seeking youth in Kampala, as well as determining the overlap between violence victimisation and perpetration among these youth and the potentially shared risk factors for these experiences. The findings reveal that 36 per cent of youths reported having been victims of violence involving a weapon while 19 per cent reported having ever perpetrated violence with a weapon. There was also an observed overlap between victimisation and perpetration with 16.6 per cent of youth (11.6% of boys and 24.1% of girls) reporting both. Similarly, Alder (1991) reports that youths perceived to pose violent threat to other members of the public can themselves be victims. They are identified as vulnerable to violent crime.

Feinstein International Center (2014) while reporting on the Engaging Male Youth in Karamoja project similarly adduces evidence that youth perpetrate violence.

We contend that the phenomenon of young people perpetrating violence cannot be disassociated with their inadequate life skills. For instance, failure to control emotions, deal with stressful situations and the perception of "an eye for an eye" very much lead young people to perpetrate violence. Turning to youth as

victims as opposed to perpetrators of violence, some youths fall victims because of lack of needed life skills. For instance, they are poor at deciding on which places to be in, when, and with whom or in whose company. Some lack the critical thinking that would help them comprehend the potential harm an environment may pose to them and how they make themselves prey to perpetrators of violence.

Information-related challenges

Many young people have access to massive, unfiltered, age-inappropriate, and junk information. Moreover, because they access it on media and internet, they believe it to be correct (Executive Director, Enterprise Uganda). The digital space is positively and negatively serving young people more or less in equal proportion. The lack of correct information about where they can get help or find available opportunities in their communities emerges as a major challenge. Lack of access to information is in part attributed to lack of or inadequate guidance from their parents and guardians. In the circumstance, youths turn to their peers, media and other sources for information. Yet sometimes, such information is not right since it is unfiltered, mixed or intended for a different purpose, occasion or audience.

It is also true that with access to technology, young people's critical thinking is diminishing. Many increasingly cannot make appropriate personal choices or decisions, their interpersonal relation skills are in the balance and they can hardly communicate effectively. It is important that the actors with the responsibility to equip children and young people with life skills guide them to use technology to enhance their life skills rather than having it diminish their life skills.

Formal education and white collar job syndrome – colonised mind

The purpose of going to school has been reduced to getting a white-collar job and youth, many with colonised minds, have turned out to be the most affected. Ideally, school is an agent of socialisation and a playground for preparing learners to become useful to themselves, their families, communities and society at large. However, preoccupied with the narrow and misguided purview of attending school reduced to getting a job, children and young people are confined to thinking within a box. They are mechanical in their thinking that a job is the ultimate essence/result of attending school. As such, many pay less attention to the broader goal of education, inter alia, facilitating one's full development and usefulness to the self, family, community and society. Yet to attain such full development, life skills are part and parcel. But young people pay less attention to the soft skills necessary to get a job, let alone retaining it if they get it. Secondly, they anchor their thinking towards white-collar job seeking as opposed to ever preparing themselves to become potential entrepreneurs. Furthermore, educated youths with such a mind-set become very frustrated and devastated by failure to get jobs to the extent of losing interest in self and others around them. Some find it difficult to cope, hence resorting to alcoholism, drug and substance abuse, and at worst attempting suicide.

To some study participants, there would be no problem if going to school was perceived to aid getting a job if the understanding of a job was rethought. The rethink in this case underpins a shift from conventional white collar jobs to any "reasonable" job that guarantees succeed. This is what life skills training is aimed at. This excerpt from a key informant from Enterprise Uganda offers an insight:

> … the concept and philosophy of job, the way we know it today, will need to be completely dismantled in that [with life skills] you will not need a letter of appointment for you to start cutting my grass in the compound. You simply approach me and say, I have seen your compound is untidy, grass has overgrown, I need to cut it, you will see how to compensate me. The fellow [owner of the home] will come back home and find a beautiful compound and say this is wonderful, here is UGX 10,000. Next three weeks you come back and do the same… Now this person you have done a good job for may invite you again next week to cut the grass, trim flowers because he is hosting visitors. The visitors will come and say you [the host] have a beautiful garden and he will say, there is a young man responsible for that, he is affordable. So the young man starts to have more customers. Within six months, the young man who started as a volunteer will be so busy and it is time for him to improve on his technology, for example if he was using a slasher, he will now get a machine and the young man has taken off. Remember, this young man could be a qualified physics teacher but he is now running a compound maintenance company. As his company takes off, he begins to have time to meet a neighbouring school and say, I have some free time on Saturday, can I give you two hours to teach? So he goes back to his profession but with confidence. He is not going as a jobless teacher, no. He is simply saying, "I am a busy man but I love teaching physics." So he goes there with inspiration, desire, motivation, self-drive, and in a short time he will be the best physics teacher and is given an appointment to teach alongside his company work… In a very short time, the young man who was looking at the world being bitter for having gone through education and no body employed him starts to say this world is so fair and rewarding.

It thus follows that there is need to revisit the philosophy of a job. The reconceptualisation ought to include the ability to be of value to the world, making one's self relevant and able to thrive

within the acceptable norms of society. This new dimension also contends that it is no longer normative to reason that one goes to school basically to get a job and if he/she never gets it, then going to school was a waste. Life skills training challenges young people not to lament about lack of capital but rather to appreciate that such attributes as drive and the desire to get started are among the important forms of capital critical for successful innovation, enterprise and business.

High family and societal expectations placed upon young people

Families and communities place heavy expectations on children. One key informant illustrates the situation as follows:

> (…) it is phenomenal for many parents to say "…am investing in my children so that in future they look after me…"

This dogma is said to be a challenge eating up young men and women. On one hand, they are preoccupied to study to get jobs at whatever cost and on the other hand, the market is less responsive.

> (…) For instance, a degree graduate is employed in a supermarket for a monthly salary of UGX 200,000 [approximately 55 USD] amidst demands from parents who paid the young man/woman's fees, the necessity to meet personal needs and the desire to save something. As the very high expectations culminate into pressure on the young men and women, they are pushed to find alternatives to cope with it. Some turn to legal but others illegal measures especially without the necessary life skills (KII - Enterprise Uganda).

Youth today are also operating in an environment that cherishes and condones getting-rich-quick, material possession regardless of the means, and little adherence to ethics and morals. The youth live in an environment that pushes them to be trendy and "modern."

This societal pressure in some instances pushes young people into risky behaviour such as theft, burglary, murder, fornication and unprotected sex, and extramarital affairs, among others.

To address these challenges, youths need life skills to enable them make informed decisions about their health, and skills to resist peer pressure.

Young people ill-equipped to succeed?

The challenges young people in Uganda face to some extent symbolise gaps in life skills among youths, hence placing them in a position where many are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to succeed in life.

Ill preparedness to succeed is premised on the following accounts:

Unstructured and uncultured generation

The current generation of young people is generally viewed as unstructured. The way they communicate (orally and written), relate, express themselves, sense opportunities, tap into opportunities, utilise resources (monetary and non-monetary), dress, walk, etc. all communicate lack of structure.

> …they cannot speak properly, they cannot walk properly, they cannot look properly, they cannot discuss/debate properly, they cannot work in groups properly, they cannot read and understand, they cannot draw/illustrate their ideas/mental images, they cannot imagine, they cannot estimate, they don't know how to manage time. The list is endless. The young people are ill equipped, they are dangerously ill-equipped (Senior educationist and education expert)

Yet contemporary society calls for some level of structure and order. Lack of structure is in part attributed to the influence of the digital world which many have turned into the source of all learning.

They copy a lot and, at times, indiscriminately. The challenge lies in the inability or reluctance to sieve out what is helpful to them and what to use under what circumstance. Consequently, those who position themselves as trendy are classified by potential employers as unworthy.

Because of lack of structure, many young people lack even the bare minimum of life skills essential for their social capital building, searching for or creating employment, maintaining jobs, patience, honesty, value relations with customers and superiors, and so on. To many young people, these attributes are a scarce resource, a distant dream. They are impatient and determined to get what they desire within the shortest time possible at whatever cost.

> They have negative attitude towards work, they are lazy, they have poor interpersonal skills, they are not creative and self-driven. So you have to push them a lot because they have no skills of self-drive, and are also very dependent on other people (Key informant-PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

Wrong role models

Young people have wrong role models they look up to within the family, community, school, work place and other settings.

> The young people are surrounded by wrong people or people who do not support their positive full growth and development. We make many statements which are counterproductive before our children. For instance you hear many parents saying "I don't want my children to suffer as I suffered when I was growing up." But you are what you are because you fought the tough battle. That battle is your identity. And so what message are you giving to your children? In many cases we even do not make efforts to guide the children (Key informant – Enterprise Uganda).

The question of who the role models for youths are today is pertinent. For many, role models' success is measured in terms of having a lot of money. Some of these are politicians, technocrats, religious leaders, family members, and friends. They have corrupted the young minds to think of getting money in whichever way—including corruption. Even in churches, the crowd pullers who are the role models have not set good examples. This further justifies the need for life skills. Through life skills, youth need to be guided on the right ways to attain success and to know that success is not measured in terms of money and materialistic culture of get-rich-quick.

Trading off human/social relations for digital objects

Digital objects such as phones, tablets and computers are necessary in the electronic era. People need to communicate and to keep track of events around the globe as well as within their immediate and distant social circles. However, the extent to which the digital objects are serving this purpose among Uganda's young people is highly contested. Secondly, whether or not these objects can replace social relations is a matter of contest. Some study participants opined that digital objects have succeeded in denying young people acquisition of necessary life skills.

> Young people are very poor at interpersonal relations because they depend on digital machines for company and disassociate with other people. Their communication is completely destroyed. When you ignore relating with people but largely focus on digital equipment, then the ability to make expressive informative communication becomes wanting. Many young people cannot engage in constructive communication after Senior Four. Technology helps people but also affects their communication skills (key informant).

It is imperative that we in no way dismiss the potential and actual contribution of the electronic media in facilitating acquisition of life skills such as public speaking, debating, and interaction. However, we acknowledge that where young people in Uganda have overly relied on these devices without a clearly defined purpose and regulation, the effects have run counter to the ideals. Young people are seen as attempting to rely on technology devices to connect with those they chose to globally. However, as Delors et al. (1996) observe, it is unlikely that humans can live together in the 'global village' when we "cannot manage to live together in the communities to which we naturally belong — the nation, the region, the city, the village, the neighbourhood" (p. 14).

Education system and stakeholders' overemphasis on grades

> …education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realise our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims. Notes Delors et al. (1996, p. 17)

Attaining good grades at any education level is certainly important and is a precursor to progressing to the subsequent education level and to some extent, job acquisition. However, an almost exclusive emphasis on grades by the education system and the key stakeholders constitutes part of the problem. The Vice Chancellor of Bishop Stuart University in Uganda once described school grades as: "…a mere representation of a student's ability to understand a concept, memorise it and reproduce it in an exam." He adds that, "life requires more than that" noting that while "school rewards people for their memory, life rewards people

for their imagination, school rewards caution while life rewards daring."

The overemphasis on grades has meant that even when schools are expected to integrate life skills training in their curricula, this remains a theoretical need since ultimately, the acquisition of life skills does not contribute to the overall grades required of a learner. Similarly, the assessment of teachers' and schools' performance does not hinge on their delivery of life skills training but upon the grades attained by the learners. This is the case in many public and private schools alike. It is only in exceptional circumstances that some schools commit to deliver life skills, though even then, the delivery of life skills is used as a marketing strategy for the school or a justification for levying exorbitant fees from learners. In other instances, such schools' integration of life skills in curricula is motivated by external intervention in form of projects. Against such a background, expecting young people who have gone through an education system that almost exclusively cherishes grades to be well-equipped to succeed in life would be setting the bar too high. The education system produces youths who fall short of the needed capacity to express themselves, communicate appropriately, relate well with others, control their emotions, manage themselves, make sound and acceptable decisions, assert their positions, and creatively and critically think.

The overemphasis on grades and all associated costs borne by young people as a result sends a message that the recommendations set forth in the Delors' Report to UNESCO in 1996 are yet to be embraced in Uganda. Delors et al. (1996) decry the formal education systems' "tendency to emphasise the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning" and thus recommend as vital the necessity "to conceive education in a more

encompassing fashion." They recommend that "such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to content and to methods," (p. 37). Evidence in Uganda however shows that the country is far from being on course of rethinking the way education is conceived in practice. The message that "choosing a type of education means choosing a type of society" (Ibid, p. 41) leaves many questions unanswered about the kind of society Uganda has chosen.

Marginalisation of young people out of school in life skills interventions

Aware that life skills are a precursor to young people's full and complete development into productive and responsible humans, both youth in and out of school deserve an equal chance to benefit from life skills training interventions. However, evidence adduced indicates that youth out of school do not have an equal chance to participate in life skills training compared to their counterparts in school. Under government arrangements, life skills programmes targeting them are rare, with the exception of the Youth Livelihood Programme. It takes the intervention of civil society organisations (CSOs) to have some of those out of school to benefit from available interventions. Moreover, where CSO training programmes target both in- and out-of-school youths, the former category is considered easier to target, follow up and thus account for. Thus, for purposes of convenience, more in-school than out-of-school youths end up being targeted. But in instances where CSOs have clearly defined project designs to target youth out of school, these youngsters benefit.

However, despite the claim that youth out of school are comparatively more marginalised than their counterparts in school, this is not to suggest that youth in school are better

equipped to succeed in life than the out-of-school youths. Not necessarily. In some instances, those out of school are more open to any opportunities, including job-related, and as they pursue various trades, they are able to master one or two. With time, they are able to curve their niche and shape their destiny. This may not necessarily be the case with youth in school who may be selective and only commit to do jobs or pursue careers that they consider commensurate with their education levels.

Vocational and apprenticeship training perceived as a preserve for "academic failures"

Vocational and apprenticeship skills are classified as practical and survival life skills that assure self-sufficiency, independence and survival of young people. Instead in Uganda, training in these skills is yet to be embraced by all. There is a general negative perception as preference is given to vertical formal education of primary-secondary-tertiary/university. Vocational and apprenticeship skills training is considered to be for young people who have failed to make it through formal vertical education. This mindset gives those in formal education, who appear to be the majority, the impression that it is wrong to engage in such practical skills. They are led to think that it is not their calling. Despite such a mindset, previous work with older children outside of family care shows that these skills offer them better life opportunities, an escape route out of biting poverty and vulnerability, and answers to a variety of their social protection needs (Luwangula, 2017). Subsequently, those with this skills-based training score better in life than many of their counterparts that ultimately attain good academic grades under the vertical formal education but which are less demanded by the labour and entrepreneurial markets. This continues to make many young people ill-prepared to succeed in life.

Parents relegate their parenting role to teachers, maids and televisions

Family, and in particular parents, are the undisputable agents of life skills training. The Convention on the Rights of the Child in its preamble, underscores the responsibility of the family and by interpretation the parents' responsibility towards the child's growth, wellbeing, protection (Para 6); full and harmonious development of the child's personality in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding (Para 7); and fully preparing the child to live an individual life in society as well as bringing up children in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity (Para 8). At the national level, Section 6 of the Principal Children Act, with an amendment taken care of in Section 5 of the Children Act (as amended) 2016, emphasises the responsibility of parents towards their children, some of whom are youths by age. Voices echoing parents as primary agents of life skills training were heard:

> The biggest part of life skills begins from home. For example, skills like working as a team, communication skills which children learn from the way their family members behave, and time management all start from home… (Key informant - Peer Link Initiative Uganda).

> The family contributes a lot to communication, self-esteem, how to relate with different people and deal with different situations. So they learn a lot from home especially if it is not a dysfunctional family (Key informant-Women of Purpose).

> Most of the fundamentals should be acquired from the home level (Senior Educationist and Education expert)

Notably though, to live to the responsibility of imparting life skills among children, the parents need to spend reasonable

time (in terms of amount and quality) with their children. This however is diminishing in many families. Partly because of work obligations, parents are spending less time with their children. Some opt to take their young children to boarding schools while others employ maids whose job description includes all matters concerning children. In essence, such parents are not in control besides being ill-positioned to monitor the contributions of the assigned agents, like teachers and maids. This is affecting the quality of life skills that children and young people acquire. Partly because of limited guidance, some are too dependent on parents and teachers even when they would be expected to demonstrate some level of independence. There are, for instance, concerns that some youths are not even given a chance to bank their school fees, to go to markets or to move out on their own. All this affects their preparedness to face the demands of the world for one to succeed. It is prudent that parents amidst their busy work schedules spare some time to fulfil their parenting duties which unquestionably encompass equipping their children with life skills. Parents further ought to make use of and support institutions like the church and schools in the delivery of life skills to children and young people.

Poor management of time by youth

Many young people have little regard for how they spend their time. They are poor at time management. Though considered an inelastic resource, to many young people, time is something not to be bothered about. Without time management skills, there is a lot for young people to lose. The skill of time management unlocks many other connected virtues such as self-drive, self-leadership, self-management and effective job performance. As heard from qualitative inquiries, time management is a skill that young people need because it is one of the things that define many, if not

all, achievers. Therefore, for young people to meet their desire to achieve, time management inevitably needs to be embraced as a virtue.

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Chapter Three

Conceptualising Life Skills

Introduction

In this chapter we recognise the absence of a universal understanding of the concept of life skills. We acknowledge that the concept is hazy and marred with diversity, breadth, complexity and controversy. The core message in this chapter, underpinned by data from both primary and secondary sources, is the demystification of the restrictive view that life skills are just soft skills.

The concept of life skills has been defined variously by different authorities. Different agencies or service sectors such as health, or child welfare conceive life skills differently but with some common grounds. UNICEF (2012) argues that the wide spectrum of content, scale, approaches and goals of life skills, which in turn mark the broad, complex and multifaceted nature of life skills, make it challenging to define and operationalise the concept. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to pin it down to some good extent despite the considered absence of a full and widely accepted definition (Ibid). UNICEF (2015) particularly

recommends efforts towards developing a definition of life skills relevant and appropriate for different age groups.

The conceptualisation follows a set of typologies discerned. We then present the evolving focus of life skills.

Typologies for conceptualising life skills

The conceptualisation follows a set of typologies we identified in primary and secondary sources. Data from primary and secondary sources suggest two broad typologies for conceptualising life skills, inter alia, a) according to the purpose they serve; and b) according to the skills sets that life skills embed.

Categorisation according to the purpose served by life skills

This typology includes the conceptualisation of life skills as psychosocial skills, empowerment skills, survival and practical skills among others.

Life skills as psychosocial skills

According to WHO (2003), life skills are "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (p. 3). WHO further conceptualises life skills as "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, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner" (2003, p. 3). Furthermore, these 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" (Ibid, p. 3). UNICEF (2012) defines life skills as "a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can

help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help lead a healthy and productive life" (p. 1). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2017a) describes life skills as psychosocial competencies and abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life; and in case of a crisis event, such skills facilitate psychosocial recovery. Life skills thus promote behavioural change, psychosocial well-being and resilience (Ibid).

From a psychosocial perspective, some study participants deconstructed life skills as follows:

> …life skills make people to understand who they are, teaching us how to live (what food must one eat, how should one look after his/her body and so on), teaching us how to do things, how to live with other people. The four pillars of life skills therefore are: who we are, how to live, how to do things, and how to relate with others. The lack of life skills thus manifests in terms of young people's inability to generate ideas, and inability to produce services, all of which result into young people falling sick easily, failing to live a useful life, becoming lawless, ignorant, and unemployed, etc. (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

The above understanding of life skills is in tandem with the essential functions of life skills for lifelong learning espoused through four pillars of education advanced by Delors et al. (1996) in their commission report to UNESCO.

Another key informant unpacked life skills as:

> [These] are skills that young people need to cope with, or manage, their adolescence-related challenges. They are both soft and practical skills. In view of the soft skills, young people need skills to help them relate well with the opposite sex, speak up

> for themselves, to fight for their rights, to come up and express themselves openly… (KII- PeerLink Initiative Uganda)

The above conceptualisation has a lot in common with Population Council's approach to life skills. Population Council looks at life skills in terms of aptitudes necessary, on one hand, to help girls deal with (prevention of and response to) a wide range of risk factors they face, and on the other hand, realise their incredible talent, energy, and resilience while creating the best opportunities for them to grow into strong, confident, and wise young women (2010). The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2017b) similarly concurs that life skills support psychosocial well-being by promoting good communication, positive thinking, analytical skills and goal-setting, cooperation and coping.

Life skills as empowerment skills

Allen and Williams (2012) describe life skills training as an avenue for young people leaving the child welfare systems to realise effective transition and independence. They point out that for young people who have been under residential care (out-of-home placements), transitioning to independent living can be a very challenging and difficult experience. Thus, they need life skills to prepare them for such challenges. In this case, life skills play a key role in "integrating young people into a community in which they experience the roles and responsibilities of young adults; facilitating a positive long-term emancipation of vulnerable young people within a constellation of support that fulfils the varied needs of youth who may need to move into young adulthood without the support or nurturance of their families; helping young people to think right about and starting to trust systems they consider to have failed to protect them; enabling youth gain a strong sense of

confidence, hope, and good judgment; and breaking through a set of psychological barriers" (p. 328).

Jacobs Foundation (2011) looks at life skills as those needed to maintain the quality of civic life, a successful and meaningful personal life, and positive social relationships; skills that help young people shape their world, not just cope with it; skills that help young people navigate the challenges of everyday life, and enable them to develop into healthy, responsible, positive and productive adults (p. 9). They are "those abilities that help promote well-being, positive health outcomes, and productive development; they are a set of core skills that empower young people to take positive steps to promote health, positive social relationships, and positive contributions to society; and aim to answer the question: *what is it that young people must have to function well in society as they find it*" (Ibid, p. 9).

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2017b) perceives life skills as those that empower and enable people to cope with life and its challenges and changes.

Life skills as practical survival skills

Consultations with key informants further suggested that life skills are also understood as practical survival skills as indicated in the quotations below:

> Life skills are survival skills. They are obtained by youth at different stages in life to be able to survive on their own, to be productive members of their communities, to be self-reliant, cope with life challenges at different stages in life, and to keep healthy e.g. sexual reproductive health. They are soft skills for example interpersonal communication, decision making, time management; but are also practical, for example doing household work, relating well with individuals, and generating income (KII-PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

> Life skills are those which one needs to survive in life… They are related to living. We are born to live and we are given the gift of life but you can't enjoy the gift when you don't have life skills. Hence, they enable people generate ideas, do things and carry out (produce) services useful to the population (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

The conceptualisation of life skills for survival links them to young people's livelihoods. This conceptualisation represents a shift from the conventional understanding of life skills as "soft skills" to one that acknowledges the "practical skills" which when combined with soft ones enable young people earn income for their self-sustenance. In light of this, the understanding of these virtues is not static but evolving. As Jacobs Foundation (2011) observes, the concept has at most been associated with young people's coping and adaptation to circumstances. However, the understanding of the concept now "presuppose[s] an active, autonomous, and responsible stance towards the self [the youth]" (p. 9). In relation to the understanding of life skills as part of livelihood skills, Edberg (2009) for instance notes that life-skills development is a common feature of adolescent development strategies and is "often discussed in connection to employment preparation" (p. 23). UNICEF further notes that specific work skills (vocational skills) combined with life skills are component parts of the preparation and capacity building of young people for productive employment. It is thus prudent to acknowledge that the conventional perspective of life skills that emphasises issues of character, personality, emotion control and management and shaping young people's behaviour is relevant but inadequate in its characterisation of life skills where practical skills that support young people's livelihoods are not taken into account.

UNICEF (2012) points out that in the recent past, life skills have been associated with poverty reduction and addressing socio-

economic inequalities. This made economists find appeal in the field of life skills. Referring to the World Bank multi-country study, UNICEF further notes that psychosocial competencies, resilience, personal agency and self-confidence enabled a person move up and out of poverty (2012, citing Narayan, 2009). The Blom and Hobbs' study (2007) highlights the link between acquisition of life skills and employment potential and workforce development. UNICEF (2012) is concerned that the acquisition of technical skills remains inadequate and they do not guarantee a young person's fulfilment until they are backed by "the social capacity to work productively, including interpersonal, cooperation, communication and creative skills, particularly in the context of ever more flexible and technological labour markets" (p. 8). To this end, business, vocational and technical skills become a relevant component of life skills.

The voices of primary study participants reinforce this understanding:

> Life skills are production skills (skills of how to do things). Humans are nothing if they can't produce, if they cannot generate ideas (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

Characterising life skills as an integral part of vocational and apprenticeship skills resonates with the employment needs of many young people within Uganda. Bearing this in mind, the Uganda Youth Livelihood Programme under Objective 3 aims to provide the youth with entrepreneurship and life skills as an integral part of their livelihoods (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development [MGLSD], 2013). Chapter Five of the Teacher's Handbook on life skills for primary schools in Uganda developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (2011) sheds light on life skills as partly livelihood and/or survival skills. The

chapter encompasses life skills for earning a living including entrepreneurial skills.

With this paradigm shift in conceptualisation, there are now programmes in place that are explicit about the integration of life skills with technical skills. A case in point is At The Crossroads, a programme that helps struggling young adults with independent living skills and training (At The Crossroads, 2016). The programme, by design, enables young people gain the conventional virtues (soft skills) alongside vocational skills. It is theorised that this is one of the best ways to help young people achieve economic independence.

Essentially, soft and practical skills are two sides of the same life aptitudes coin. The following remarks offer some insight:

> Definitely there is a relationship between life skills and survival. If a young person has the necessary life skills, he or she is likely to be more adaptive to life. Young people who are oriented well with soft skills manage better in life. They can study better, excel more and perform better in the world of work. They succeed because of these skills that everyone needs in addition to academic documents, though the latter are also important (key informant- PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

> The relevance of life skills lies in one's survival, that is, how they perform at work, how they will handle people, money, and decisions (key informant- Women of Purpose)

Nonetheless, there were a few divergent voices that maintained that life skills were distinct from vocational skills.

> …different people confuse life skills with vocational skills. I personally don't think vocational skills are life skills. Vocational skills are more practical, maybe hands-on skills, employable skills yet life skills are soft skills that are very important for the youth to thrive in life (KII-Women of Purpose).

Deduced from the above, the perceived scope or constituents of life skills has a strong bearing on the breadth of the training package offered to the youth. Actors that perceive life skills as only soft skills are more likely to exclusively focus on those. On the other hand, actors whose conceptualisation takes care of the soft and practical skills are more likely to focus on securing a balance between the two. Evidence so far indicates that young people empowered with an integral package of life skills, soft and practical skills, benefit more and become more complete relative to those with exclusive soft or hard skills. We should note that while at conceptual level it may be possible to dissociate life skills from practical ones such as the vocational, apprenticeship and entrepreneurship, it may not be feasible at a practical level taking into consideration the intended purpose of life skills.

Common grounds across the psychological, empowerment and survival/practical life skills

Whereas we attempt to categorise the conceptualisation of life skills based on the purpose they serve, there is no suggestion that these categories are mutually exclusive. Indeed they ought not to be viewed that way. Rather, there are various common positions across the defined typologies. For instance, there is consensus among different authors that regardless of the classification, life skills are particularly important for youth at risk. Life skills aim largely to address the risks that young people are trapped in. Moreover, every youth at some point may be at risk by virtue of the age dictations, peer pressure, perceived pressure and expectations from society. Thus, young people need life skills to transform risk into resilience (Eggert, Nicholas, & Owen, 1995).

Cunningham, Cohan, Naudeau, and McGinnis (2008) define youths at risk as "individuals aged between 12 and 24 years who

face environmental, social, and family conditions that hinder their personal development and their successful integration into society as productive citizens. They have a greater propensity than their peers to engage in or be subject to risky behavior, including school absenteeism, risky sexual behavior, delinquency, violence, and substance use and abuse" (p. 9). They observe further that the behaviours that the youth at risk engage in affect their ability to make a successful transition to adulthood and result into negative outcomes such as school dropout, unemployment, adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, addiction, incarceration, and social exclusion. In addition, Allen and Williams (2012) point out that the process of young people transitioning to independent (adult) life can be characterised by stress and anxiety and thus require interventions to address and resolve behavioural, attitudinal, or motivational issues associated with the transition. In this case, life skills become indispensable.

Some participants concurred that life skills regardless of purpose, are fundamental in society:

> These are skills that are fundamental for every human being as they lay a foundation to become a useful human being. One uses them to make a difference in his/her life and in the community. They are applicable wherever one goes and their acquisition is not a preserve of the schooled. Rather, they can be acquired by any person no matter whether or not they went to school… Life skills help to rewrite one's bad history. Anybody with good life skills would be useful no matter his history (KII-Enterprise Uganda).

Categorisation of life skills according to skills sets

Generally, life skills are categorised into skills sets. For example, the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO, 2001) and UNICEF (2009, p. 24) separately identify the following set:

social and interpersonal skills (communication, cooperation, refusal, assertiveness, interpersonal, and empathy), cognitive skills (decision-making, understanding consequences, critical thinking, and self-evaluation), and emotional coping skills (managing stress, anger, general self-management, and increasing an internal locus of control). The WHO (2003) points out in regard to promoting health and wellbeing of children and adolescents, that the core set encompasses the following ten skills: decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. Delors et al. (1996) identify learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be as a necessary set for lifelong learning.

In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports (2011) in its Teacher's Handbook on life skills for primary schools presents a skills set containing, among others, skills for knowing and living with oneself (self-awareness, self-esteem, assertiveness, coping with emotions, and coping with stress); skills for knowing and living with others (relating with others, negotiation skills, empathy, managing peer relationships, effective communication, and non-violent conflict resolution skills); skills for decision making (creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving); earning a living (alternatives of earning a living, entrepreneurship, functions of entrepreneurs, and factors to consider before starting a business); and leadership skills. A critical review of these skills as provided in the Teacher's Handbook reveals that while the education system acknowledges the necessity to equip primary school children with life skills, this remains more of an ideal. The education system remains glaringly inadequate in dealing with life skills. Life skills training for children and youth

in school remains an under or even un-prioritised component of the education system. In any case, it is not examinable and thus approached as an additional responsibility in practice.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP] (2009) advances a set of principles or key elements that any sound life skills programme ought to embed but bearing in mind that these "need to be translated into the local context to determine specific skills and content focus." The key elements include:

a) Developing life skills applied to issues relevant to young people's developmental tasks and social context;
b) Combining life skills development training with content to address the social and developmental tasks relevant to the youth; and
c) Adapting programming that contributes to the development of life skills, including peer-to-peer approaches and interactive learning processes.

These elements have been taken into account in the design of life skills training programmes by some of the agencies visited at the time of data collection.

Evolving focus of life skills

Literature suggests that the motivations for life skills programmes have over time evolved with: a) the changing challenges that young people face; but also, b) the changes in response to such challenges. Particularly in developing economies, life skills were embraced as a response to the challenges of HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 2003, 2009; Kibret, 2016; Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda, 2011). In Africa,

HIV/AIDS popularised the life skills drive. Kibret (2016) for instance highlights that before HIV/AIDS became a threat to Africa's current and future generations, life skills were almost unheard of or they were unpopular. But with the emergence of HIV/AIDS, life skills became part of the prevention (behavioural change) campaign. It was then that life skills/peer education training guidelines and outcome indicators were developed in African countries such as Ethiopia (Kibret, 2016). In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports (2011) introduced life skills for learners and adolescents in school supported by the Teacher's Handbook on life skills for primary schools in Uganda. This came as "an essential aspect for confronting the crisis caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other social problems facing young people" (Ibid, p. 1). A similar trend is traceable in Asia. For example the Life Skills Training Guide for Young People with a focus on HIV/AIDS and Substance Use Prevention was developed in part as a response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (UNESCAP, 2003).

Elsewhere, the UNESCAP (2009) positions life skills as a measure to address the knowledge gap about HIV/AIDS, and young women's greater preoccupation with pregnancy than HIV which ultimately "places them at the frontiers of exposure to transmission through sexual activity that may not always be by their choice."

Within the realm of international political commitments to life skills education, UNICEF (2012) identifies among other things the UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session [on HIV/AIDS]) Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. This reaffirms the historical focus of life skills on responding to the HIV scourge.

To date, it would be a narrow perception and conceptualisation of life skills if considered to be particularly serving the purpose

of addressing behavior change needs and personal character in the context of HIV prevention. Currently, life skills are quite linked to preparing young people for leadership, employment and generally enabling youths deal with and overcome any challenges they face in life. These cut across health (e.g. HIV/AIDS), livelihood and employment, education (remaining in school, completion of school, and going back to school), violence (including GBV), society pressures (such as the pressure to look trendy, get rich quick), peer pressure (substance abuse and crime), morality, and so on. Considering that life skills bear a purpose of "preparing young people and adults to negotiate and mediate everyday challenges and risks and enable productive participation in society" (UNICEF, 2012a), by all standards, life skills cut across a much broader spectrum than serving as a preventive response to HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the concept of life skills is described as broad, complex, multifaceted (Ibid) and dynamic.

Qualitative inquiries with key informants revealed that challenges of HIV, poverty and teen pregnancy have been part of the central focus of life skills in Uganda. However, others argue that in contemporary times, alongside focus on sexual and reproductive health, many organisations offering life skills training are emphasising practical skills so as to address the issue of lack of work-related skills or employable skills. An emphasis on a shift in focus towards the mix between the soft and hard skills is well elaborated.

> (…) They [life skills] still focus on sexual reproductive health because young people are in their prime sexual reproductive stage or adolescence, transitioning into adult stage. [course] as they transit, they face a number of sexual reproductive challenges like how to cope with adolescence, understanding who they are, and relating with opposite sex. All these challenges affect what

> they do even when it comes to practical work. If you train young girls in practical skills and you do not give them important reproductive health information, you will get a number of them pregnant, or running out to marry at an early age… So some practitioners are focusing on practical skills and soft skills and just a few are focusing on mere information provision (Key informant-PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

Challenges related to difficulty in accessing formal jobs in Uganda and other developing countries also explains the shift in focus. Young people are increasingly accepting that access to formal jobs is a distant dream even with academic qualifications. Hence, some programmes are positively considering equipping young people to start business either as individual or group entrepreneurs. Uganda's Youth Livelihood programme (YLP) serves as an example, although this programme focuses on financially supporting established functional youth groups without necessarily training them in entrepreneurship skills, one of the reasons for its underperformance.

A shift in focus towards starting and sustaining businesses after acquiring the skills is well-illustrated in the following remark:

> Yes, one challenge is access to capital by those who want to start business as we try to give employment solutions to the youth. Incidentally we over focus on the money for them to start business. And we think once they get the money, they are good to go. But practice shows that because the young man lacks life skills for business success, he gets the money, starts implementing his business plan, makes losses and loses all the money. That fellow feels useless and his confidence is damaged (…). The massive amounts of capital is lost because of lack of basic skills and some of them are life skills such team building, leadership, negotiation, communication with customers and selling. This tells you that it is not just about the capital, it's

> about the personality, the basic ingredients that compose your being and make you do work to your best, the ability to courageously learn from your bad past and confidently move on — the life skills (Key informant-Enterprise Uganda)

From the preceding remarks, it is clear that the concept of life skills is dynamic, not static. As Jacobs Foundation (2011) observes, the concept was conventionally associated with young people's coping and adaptation to circumstances but has since evolved to "presuppose an active, autonomous, and responsible stance towards the self in the social world." The concept has embraced such aspects as independent living or a transition to independent adult life. Independent living makes the case for business, technical and vocational skills. In this respect, different programmes in different parts of the world have this paradigm shift. One common example is At The Crossroads (At The Crossroads, 2016). The premise of this programme is that even though young people gain the conventional soft skills but without the vocational skills, the ultimate goal of independent living then hangs in the balance. Another example is Uganda's Youth Livelihood Programme that also integrates soft and practical survival skills.

The key message here is that the focus of life skills has changed with time. Thus, without being sensitive to the needs of young people in the current times, there is a likelihood of designing irrelevant life skills interventions. Secondly, while in the Ugandan and other contexts HIV/AIDS played a role to popularise life skills, the life skills referred to in this case are basically the soft skills but not the hands-on skills. The two form two sides of the same coin and life skills interventions ought to strike a balance between the two.

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Chapter Four

Approaches and Settings for Delivery of Life Skills Training

Introduction

To deliver or equip young people with life skills, targeted programmes utilise a variety of approaches. Notable though is the fact that there is no single approach to delivering a life skills programme. The most common approaches include peer-to-peer, group, infusion/integration of life skills training in mainstream education curriculum, infusion/integration of life skills training in other development programmes, and community-based. Understanding these approaches offers a good framework for analysing the existing programmes in Uganda.

Data used in this chapter was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes that collected as part of the evaluation of AVSI's SCORE life skills project as well as the additional data collected from Kampala.

The common approaches used

Parent-child or community-child (societal) inculcation of life skills

The role of parents and community in inculcating life skills among children at an early age and throughout childhood and youth-hood is uncontested. Parents train their children to learn basic skills such as being thankful, remorseful, sharing and relating with others. Children learn this through rewards and encouragement but also through punishment. It is within families and communities that children learn basic skills such as peeling food, preparing/cooking food, bathing, and washing. Children within homes learn to have a daily or weekly calendar, they learn to confront challenges (problem-solving), build relations within and outside the family, make decisions, set life and career goals, among other skills. It is thus a common practice that parents and communities inculcate life skills among children though this varies from parent to parent and community to community. For example, the parenting style used by a parent may greatly influence the life skills that a parent imparts in his or her child. At community level, more closed and individualistic communities may impact on the life skills acquired by the children therein differently from open and collective communities.

Peer-to-peer (Peer education)

This approach to life skills education/training places a youth (who is typically the same age or slightly older than the group with whom he/she is working) in the role of an educator of/among fellow young people. UNICEF (2012b) asserts that the underlying premise of this approach is that among many young people, change is a product of "not only what they (young people) know, but also the opinions and actions of their close, trusted

peers." On a similar note, Abdi and Simbar (2013) suggest that behavioural change and attitudinal modifications are more likely if the influence comes from peers who face similar concerns and pressures. The duo underlines as critical the role that peers play in the psychosocial development of fellow adolescents by providing opportunities for personal relationships, social behaviour, and a sense of belonging as well as affecting each other's feelings of health, habits and behaviour.

The peer educators should have attributes such as the ability to "communicate and understand in a way that the best-intentioned adults can't, raise awareness, provide accurate information, and help their peers develop skills to change behaviour" as well as serving as role models for change (Ibid, 2012b). This approach is cherished for its invaluable relevance in multiple settings, including school settings, street youth, sex workers, drug users, and youth in conflict with the law. Abdi and Simbar (2013) contend that this approach makes sense given the tendency by adolescents to "naturally resist any dominant source of authority such as from parents in preference to socialise more with their peers than with their families."

For youths to impart life skills among peers, they use a variety of methods including but not limited to: leading informal discussions, one-on-one time talking, video and drama presentations, offering counselling, support and referral to services and in the context of life skills for HIV prevention, the peers can hand out condoms, leaflets and brochures (UNICEF, 2012b). Other methods include small group presentations, role plays, or games, informal tutoring in unstructured settings, etc. (Abdi and Simbar, 2013). Ultimately, the youth are enabled to discuss and address sensitive topics/ subjects such as sexual relationships and substance abuse which in

some contexts are considered taboos (Ibid, 2013). Evidence shows that this approach bears a lot of promise. UNICEF (2012b) notes that qualitative evaluations have shown that:

- Young people appreciate and are influenced in positive ways by a peer-led intervention if it is well-designed and properly supervised;
- Serving as a peer educator provides a challenging and rewarding opportunity to young people to develop their leadership skills, gain the respect of their peers, and improve their own knowledge base and skills;
- Peer educators often change their own behaviour after functioning as peer educator;
- Within school, it can foster fulfilling relationships between teachers and students;
- It can give girls legitimacy to talk about sex without the risk of being stigmatised as sexually promiscuous (particularly when peer-led activities take place in single-sex groups);
- Peer educators can provide a valuable link to health services such as HIV/AIDS services, rehabilitation for alcohol and drug addicts;
- Peer educators have shown in some cases to be more effective than adults in establishing norms and in changing attitudes related to sexual behaviour.

Source: *UNICEF (2012b). Available at: https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html*

A key message from different authorities is that in spite of the potential of peer-to-peer approach addressing the gaps in traditional life skills approaches such as adult-led education and

training by teachers (Abdi and Simbar, 2013), peer-to-peer yields better results if used in a complementary fashion with other approaches rather than in isolation (UNICEF, 2012b). UNICEF observes that, peers though good at influencing change among peers, are not necessarily better in transmitting factual health information (Ibid). UNAIDS (1999) adds to the key message that "peer educators selected must be acceptable to the target group and their personality must be both conducive to training and suited to the work they will be doing" (p. 28, citing Svenson, 1998). To achieve this, UNAIDS suggests a selection strategy that entails use of social network analysis and nomination techniques to identify and select peer educators. In addition, the peer educators must fit the needs of a diversity of peer groups within a larger population such as female, male youths with varying ages from different backgrounds associated with different attitudes, beliefs, social norms, communication patterns, and behaviours (Ibid, 1999, p. 28).

Group approach

Allen and Williams (2012) observe that "group work offers youth in transition opportunities to establish a base of support and a culture of social learning in which youth can, under the eye and with the help of an experienced and supportive facilitator, examine and resolve the issues these youth face in attempting to achieve independent living (p. 326)." Typical of the group approach is that the young people get the opportunity to "learn from one another, to reflect on their own lives, mobilise latent or dormant strengths of members, and to gain insight into the lives of others and how they achieved independence in adult life" (Ibid, p. 326). This serves to promote and strengthen the group. The model also has a premise of rendering a strategy that integrates support, skill

development, social learning, and personal development among young people (Ibid).

Bruce Tuckman's Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing (Tuckman, 1965) and later Adjourning in 1975 (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) theory renders insight into the group approach to life skills training. The life skills group undergoes these stages through which members establish relationships, develop maturity and ability, and get clear about the purpose of the groups.

Standalone life skills training programmes

In some instances, life skills programmes operate as standalone in the sense that they identify eligible young people (based on criteria set by intervening agency), organise them and offer them life skills training. This approach, in some instances, bears some qualities of peer-to-peer and group approaches. The agency identifies trainers who agree with the youths on such modalities of how often training sessions will be conducted every week, how many hours for each meeting, the time of the day when to meet, location of the meeting, and so on. A standard curriculum is delivered to the youth in this case. Targeted youth may be those out of school, in-school or both. This was the case under the AVSI model.

Usually for youth out of school, organisations more often than not integrate the practical skills with the soft skills. Under the practical arm of life skills, tailor-made training is offered. They are normally attached to local artisans for a defined period of time depending on the trade offered by the young person such as carpentry and joinery, building and concrete practice, tailoring, bakery, and hairdressing. Interactions with study participants however revealed that commonly, the vocational/apprenticeship programmes are taken separately from the soft skills programmes. Indeed, some described their youth programmes as two: 1) life

skills — referring to the soft skills training; and 2) vocational/ apprenticeship. This affirms the view that some actors are yet to appreciate the soft and practical survival skills as two sides of the same coin.

Integration into mainstream education curriculum

While some life skills programmes operate as standalone interventions implemented on a project basis, there have been recurrent voices in the recent past to integrate life skills training in the mainstream education curriculum. Kibret (2016) submits that the absence of life skills from the academic discourse in Africa is conspicuous. In his view, it was not until the HIV/AIDS prevention models attempted in Africa fell below the expectations of actors that they started considering integrating life skills training in the education curriculum as an HIV prevention strategy (Ibid). Indeed, the 1990s and 2000s have seen the continued focus on the integration in schools. The WHO for instance in 1994 introduced Guidelines to Facilitate the Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programmes targeting children and adolescents in schools (WHO, 1994).

In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports (2011) produced a Teacher's Handbook on life skills for primary schools in which the ministry acknowledges that, particularly in the 1990s, neglecting of life skills of learners and adolescents in their school education programmes was characteristic of the whole Eastern and Southern Region of Africa (ESAR). But as awareness grew, life skills steadily found a place in education programmes for children and adolescents in school.

A key informant from Uganda's Ministry of Education illustrated how the integration model works:

> …you are not going to get it [the ministry's life skills model] from a certain book. Look at the entire education system - it is about life skills. Right from nursery school, those young ones are taken through processes where they are encouraged to share, to live in harmony with others, and to explore. In primary they continue. So you are not going to say that this is our life skills programme, no. Learners are being told to stand up in class and raise their points. That is a life skill. That is part of learning expression and articulation. Learners are being taught to sit and listen. This learning is on day-to-day and minute-by-minute basis. Teachers keep telling them to keep quiet. Learners are taken out of class to go and play. That is a life skill where they learn to relate with others. So you are not going to say that this is the life skills programme. Rather, it is the totality of the entire education system. And it highlights where we are not doing it right. That is the gap (KII- Ministry of Education, Uganda).

This approach to life skills training is lauded for being relatively cheaper and perhaps sustainable. However, some voices expressed concern that without discounting this approach/model, the integration of life skills in mainstream education has deprived life skills of the focus and attention they deserve. There has always been an imbalance in focus between life skills and other facets of mainstream education. Even among the teachers expected to deliver life skills training under this approach, some are not committed or they do not have a good understanding of the potential of life skills.

> …as such, we have a growing phenomenon of many people with good academic papers but whose life skills are wanting (KII - Enterprise Uganda).

This phenomenon is partly attributed to the view that for the teachers expected to deliver life skills training to learners under this integrated model, the appraisal of their performance at the

end of the day is not based on life skills training delivered to the learners. Rather, it is based on how many learners have been promoted or have passed.

> What we are emphasising in these schools is passing exams. For me passing exams has nothing to do with life skills (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

It is on this note that some commentators argue that life skills training has been relegated to the periphery in Uganda. Yet on the other hand, even if the integration into mainstream education hit optimal levels, many young people outside formal education or completely out of school would not benefit. In the circumstances, interventions that are sensitive to these realities are necessary. Such was AVSI's approach.

Infusion of life skills training in other development programmes

In some instances, some actors report implementation of life skills programmes but as infused in other development agendas. In this case, the life skills is only a subset of the broader programme. This was said to be the case for agencies like Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL). The advantage of this approach is that even when the implementing agency has no defined budget for life skills training, the targeted young people get an opportunity to learn some life skills critical to their living and survival. However, the challenge is that life skills training is less prioritised or comes secondary to the programme's primary agenda.

Another dimension that emerged during field visits was that some actors were implementing life skills programmes as infused but had little or no idea that they were actually implementing life skills agenda basically because the programme was not defined as so. This gave an insight that amidst growing focus and emphasis

on life skills, adequate knowledge about this focus area is yet to be secured even among actors working with young people. This has implications. For instance, such actors were unlikely to think critically about addressing young people's needs through life skills. Secondly, they did not have any comprehension, let alone appreciation, of the breadth of scope. They were also less likely to reflect on the broad aim and focus of life skills.

Settings for acquisition of life skills

The approaches to life skills training are not implemented in a vacuum but in a variety of settings which offer different opportunities for young people. In this volume, we present five settings. These are the family and community, school, tertiary institutions/university, work place and places of worship.

The family

The family is the natural and primary unit of socialisation. The model family ideally plays a fundamental role in imparting life skills among children. For instance it is in the family that children learn:

> Being responsible. For example when you finish eating, get your plate, take it where it is washed from, and clean the table. You learn to lay your bed and clean the compound… Issues to do with appreciating money or income, how it comes home and how it is earned. Also learning to be of value at home, time management and respect skills starts at home (Key informant – Enterprise Uganda)

It was a common view among study participants that any other settings of life skills training build on the foundation laid by the family. Otherwise, there would be nothing to build on. Solidarity, communication, time management, and the practical skills such

as gardening, cooking, and washing have their foundation at a family level.

> Most of the fundamentals should be acquired from home... it should teach us how to look after our bodies, how to work to survive, like cooking, cleaning and so on. Home should teach us how to share responsibility, plan, interpersonal relationships, how to pursue our goals and achieve them… (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

However, on many fronts, the family is not living to its role, a laxity that was decried.

> …so we can say that the fundamental bricks that make a human being are laid by the family. But the question is, are we laying those bricks? Are the parents there all the time providing the time needed? Are they guiding the children to develop the brain, for example during their first five years of life? Are they supporting the children's social, emotional, physical, behavioural growth and development? The answer is not a straight yes. Most children go through the first five years without their brains being nurtured. So when they become teenagers, they are already disarrayed and disorganised (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

Deduced from the foregoing, the core functions of the family remain much appreciated despite their fading trend. The implication is that it is necessary to support the family. Any life skills training programmes targeted at young people ought to recognise the role of the family and its potential impact on its young members. Thus, it makes sense working with the family by implementing interventions with the family on board.

School

School is another agent of socialisation where learners are expected to build on the basics of life that they have acquired and continue to secure from the family. The socialisation that children

and young people get at school in part takes a form of life skills. Since school activities are more structured than those in home settings and because in school individual performance is measured and graded, children and young people learn such skills as time management, hard work, and responsibility. Schools are expected to offer young people the ground to learn team building skills, leadership skills, conflict resolution, self-esteem, goal setting, decision making, critical thinking, and coping with emotions.

> They [schools] should be training children, providing them with an environment where children's brains can acquire knowledge. They should be training children to use their brains, to think, to do research or group work (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

However, like families, schools are said to be declining in the equipping of young people. There is particular concern surrounding an imbalance in focus between the graded subjects and the ungraded life skills.

> …the school today is not providing the life skills because they are generally focusing on examinations. Research has shown that over 80% of the time spent in school is committed to class work, doing and passing examinations. But does doing and passing examinations equal to life skills or success in life? The answer is NO... Life is about what you have learnt to develop and use your mental abilities, how much knowledge you have acquired, how sharp your brain is to innovate ideas, the sort of emotions you have and how you have trained your body to work (Senior Educationist and Education expert).

> The school should be training learners how to relate, deal with other people... But children and youths are not learning that because they are focusing on examinations. A child finishes S.4 without learning how to work in a group… cannot speak and convince people, cannot read and understand. The school

> should be emphasising the growth of the body and development of the mind. The subjects taught in secondary school should be minimal. The idea should be opening the learners' brains and minds to acquire and use their knowledge on their own (Key informant).

Tertiary institutions/universities

For young people that manage to make it to tertiary institutions, the prime goal is getting a job or starting a business in a few years. But the fact that mere getting a diploma or degree certificate is no guarantee of achieving such a goal, life skills become an important intervening variable that bridges the gap between attaining university education and the labour market or business community. Thus tertiary institutions are an important setting for young people's acquisition of such skills as leadership (the ability to influence), courage, marketing, a sense of pride and appreciation… (Key informant – Enterprise Uganda).

This setting is also expected to pass on employability competence to youths since this is what employers expect. Employers want people with soft skills, who are mentally strong, self-driven, who can work in time and who can initiate things on their own. Tertiary institutions can tailor these skills to youth in preparation for the world of work. Tertiary institutions are further expected to build the students' capacity to think on their own, innovate ideas, do research, produce services, and to be relevant to society.

Tertiary institution/university settings should equip young people for the world of work, skills that enhance their competence to add value to their workplaces as employees or entrepreneurs. However, to some study participants, judging from the quality, attitude and mind-set of graduates, universities have a lot to do to

convince the public — particularly the entrepreneurs/employers - that the young people graduating are employable.

Workplace

Unlike the preceding settings, the opportunities that the workplace offers to acquire life skills come with a cost. More often than not, as young people join the world of work, there is a lot expected of them in terms of technical and life skills. This is irrespective of whether the young person is an employee or an entrepreneur. The assumption is that they should have acquired these skills from home, school and university. Thus, the workplace is more of an experimentation ground and less of a learning ground. Consequently when young people score poorly in life skills, there is even a possibility of losing their jobs or businesses, their technical competence notwithstanding. It is partly for this reason that internship, fieldwork, practicum, industrial training and volunteer-ship programmes are critical to the academic paths of learners. Nonetheless, there are some life skills that youths can acquire or sharpen from their workplaces such as teamwork, effective communication, marketing skills, leadership, customer care, decision making, interpersonal relations, crisis management, and stress management. However whereas the workplace can offer a ground to learn these skills, the preference should be looking at the workplace setting principally to sharpen rather than totally learn these skills.

Arising from the foregoing, any interventions that equip young people with life skills as early as possible are critical in supporting them become better employees, entrepreneurs and business people. Such programmes need to be integrated with the technical training of young people such that as they join the labour market

or business/entrepreneurial community, they have a hybrid of skills necessary for their success.

Places of worship

Churches and mosques offer a setting for young people to acquire life skills.

> Because the churches interact with a big number of youths, they could also do a lot in re-emphasising soft skills alongside the spiritual emphasis. So they have platforms where young people have time to reflect and work in groups, for example in camps (Key informant – PeerLink Initiative Uganda).

Places of worship preach values of integrity, hope, and self-esteem. Some informants argued that it is very Christian to have life skills, which, in part, define one's Christian life.

> As Christians, we believe we are special and God made us special with a purpose. We cannot just be aimless beings. That way, you cannot impact someone else's life. For example if you know that you are loved by God, you are able to love other people. For example when girls come here, most of them are broken, feel useless, feel used and worthless but when we introduce that Christian perspective of: "you are loved, accepted, special and you still have value no matter who says what," I believe that makes a big difference in someone's life. So the girls get a sense of self-worth (Key informant – Women of Purpose)

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Chapter Five

Implementing a Life Skills Training Programme by AVSI Foundation — The Vijana Life Skills Model

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of AVSI Foundation's Vijana life skills model (training programme). It provides background information on the development of the programme, the theory of change, targeted beneficiaries, and complementary actions, the life skills training programme content, delivery methodology and implementation. It also highlights some of the achievements, challenges, and promising practice. The chapter utilises primary data from field staff and programme managers, and secondary data based on programme reports.

Youth under the DREAMS project empowered in hair dressing.

Background

In 2011, AVSI Foundation developed the Vijana life skills model targeting adolescents and youths between the ages of 12 and 35 in and out of school under the Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for vulnerable children and their families (SCORE) programme households. SCORE was a seven-year (initially five years with a two-year extension) US$ 38,322,700 USAID-funded ($34,326,470 USAID and $3,996,230 cost share) project implemented by a consortium led by AVSI Foundation with CARE, TPO and FHI360 as implementing partners in 35 districts of Uganda. The project goal was to reduce vulnerability of more than 125,000 critically and moderately vulnerable children (VC) and their family members.

The SCORE project targeted vulnerable households affected by HIV/AIDS, poverty, chronic illnesses, disability, orphan-hood and

child- or elderly-headed households. The Vijana Life Skills Model was premised on the view that "adolescence is a stage filled with excitement, new feelings, many unanswered questions, changes, and difficult choices," hence the need for an essential package in helping the youth make informed decisions and cope with the challenges and their eventual transition to adulthood (AVSI Foundation, 2013). AVSI Foundation is cognisant that the age range of 0-12 years may be equally crucial for nurturing and imparting life skills and that all life experiences are an opportunity to acquire life skills. However, given the unique challenges that adolescence presents, youth aged 12 to 35 were given focus in AVSI Foundation's Vijana Life Skills Model under the SCORE programme.

To complement the training interventions for better and sustainable outcomes, the youth were also enrolled and integrated into other combined social economic activities including apprenticeship skills training, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups, Junior Farmer Field School, financial literacy and market-oriented skills trainings. In addition, other social asset-related skills including parenting and psychosocial related activities were provided.

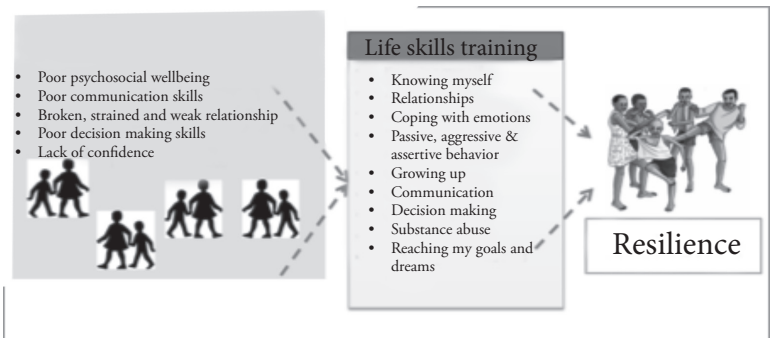
By June 2017, AVSI Foundation had reached 31,943 HHs and 178,974 people against the project target of 25,000 households and 125,000 people respectively by April 2018. Of those reached, at least 76,959 people (43%) were adolescents and youth. Beneficiaries were targeted with a mix of activities namely, socio-economic strengthening, food security and nutrition, child protection and legal services and strengthening families to acquire, provide and access critical services. AVSI used a case management approach in which beneficiary households' needs were mapped along with their resources and documented into a household

development plan. It is on the basis of this plan that programme staff articulated the relevant interventions for a household, allowing for each household to take on tailored pathways unique to their own needs. Through this approach, about 15 per cent of the adolescents and youth in the households needed life skills training. By June 2017, SCORE had trained 11,035 adolescents and youth.

AVSI Foundation Vijana life skills theory of change

The life skills training programme intervention hypothesised that by equipping adolescents and young people with life skills, they would be empowered to understand who they are, appreciate where they are going, better manage the challenges along the way and consequently adopt positive behaviour that would enable them to find meaning and fulfilment in their lives as they mature. Figure 1 represents the Vijana life skills training programme theory of change which links the challenges the youth face, the life skills they need to develop the necessary resilience and skills to succeed in life as adults.

Figure 1: *Vijana life skills training programme theory of change*



Source: *AVSI Foundation Vijana Life Skills Model*

In order to effectively impact young people's lives, it was further conceived that interventions within the family/household setting needed to be in place to support the family provide the youths with basic necessities that would in effect facilitate their participation in life skills training and enable better outcomes. The interventions included mobilising other family members to participate in dialogues and sensitisation sessions on various themes including how to better handle youth and engage them.

Design of AVSI Foundation Vijana life skills training intervention

The life skills interventions were designed based on other existing modules and curricula within AVSI Foundation and other externally developed and tested resources. Utilising the extensive work of AVSI in their publications, "The Value of Life" and "Do You want to play with me?," AVSI and IRC publication "Life skills manual for participants and Youth in Northern Uganda and Karamoja Region," and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation Uganda publication, "A Guide on How to Start and Implement Ariel Children's Clubs." The other publications were Health Initiatives for the Private Sector Project publication, "Cognitive and Life Planning Skills Manual" and Family Health International (FHI) India Country Office In Collaboration with the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) publication, "Life Skills Education Toolkit for orphans and other vulnerable participants in India," the AVSI life skills training curriculum was developed and contextualised locally.

Identification and recruitment of beneficiaries

The training sessions were open to all youth in and out of school from SCORE-supported households that were found in need of

life skills during the needs mapping and household development planning. All 35 SCORE districts were equally targeted. Following the identification of youth eligible for life skills training, the youth were placed into groups comprising 25–30 youth within their geographical locality (usually a parish and sometimes a village). Both girls and boys were targeted. The groups of youth, particularly those out of school, were trained within communities using workshops as the major method of training. The intention of this kind of training with a specific group of older children was to enable them attain life skills that can be useful for them and also to enable them be a source of support and guidance for fellow children who look up to them. For in-school groups, teachers were trained in life skills as trainers and they were tasked to identify children and their peers and train them within the school setting as agreed upon with the school administration. Teachers were provided with appropriate training to facilitate the training, including provision of psychosocial support. The training also adopted a variety of other methods including one-to-one mentoring, role plays and giving youth challenging assignments with the goal of making the training exciting and practical.

Implementation process

AVSI Foundation led the drafting of the SCORE Life Skills Manual at the start of the project in 2011. This was followed by a training of trainers (ToT) for the family strengthening consortium staff who then provided training to their frontline implementing social workers. The ToTs were conducted for one week per region, helping the activity staff to internalise and try out the key aspects of the model. Consortium level partners included AVSI as the lead, TPO and CARE as implementers while Fhi360 offered strategic information support to all partners. Each agency brought

on board a wealth of expertise that helped the roll out of the life skills intervention across the 35 project districts in the east, east central, central, north, south and south west of Uganda. Over 150 social workers were equipped to enrol groups of beneficiary youths, each group for a period of at least four months.

Life skills training curriculum

The AVSI Foundation Vijana life skills intervention is articulated in a manual divided into ten modules with a number of sessions and a variety of activities under each session. Users are encouraged to use these tools to provide a rationale and framework for selecting and adapting the sessions and activities to their specific context. In addition, the modular format is chosen to enable users have a manageable spaced scheme of work at different times. The users are encouraged to organise participants in groups not bigger than 25 and go over module after module with certain practice breaks in between. Each activity has discussion sessions to help link the activity to real experiences. In addition, a facilitator's message is provided as a reminder for the facilitator on key points related to a specific session. This manual encourages innovation and contextualisation according to specific needs and therefore facilitators are discouraged from taking every activity's examples as complete and fitting in all situations. The facilitator must choose carefully as some sessions discuss sensitive feelings and thoughts that must be supported by earlier activities to make the participants feel comfortable. The life skills sessions might bring up strong emotional and psychosocial issues that would need to be tackled by professionals, such as psychologists and counsellors. Therefore during the breaks, between meetings, it is expected that the youth are individually followed up and supported at home/ outside the bigger group to deal with the identified issues. The

sessions are geared towards helping young people learn life skills and encouraging them to support and help each other both during and outside the training sessions.

Summary of each module

Module one (Getting started): The module focuses on creating rapport between the facilitator and the participants as well as among the participants. As a means of working well with each other, orderliness is given priority by setting up ground rules together, followed by generation of expectations by the youths. Helpers are also identified for the proper governance of the group. The facilitator then introduces the contents of the training, outlining the entire path of the manual. An introduction of the participants then follows. Critical attention is placed on the discovery of the self-identity through exploring social-cultural backgrounds of individual participants. An effort is made to understand from the participants themselves, the kind of challenges they are facing and how these can be responded to through life skills education.

Module two (Knowing myself): The module focuses on helping the adolescents and youth understand better who they really are in terms of their behaviour, character, and manner, and points out their strong points and areas that they could strengthen. It points adolescents and youth towards self-awareness and gives them skills to appreciate who they are.

Module three (**Relationships**): The module tackles a very critical subject in the life of adolescents: how to manage relationships. At the onset of the teenage phase, many adolescents go through a very trying phase as they experiment in different relationships, often finding themselves in risky relationships with peers and in strained relationships with adults. This module helps them to verify and appreciate every relationship they get involved

in. It covers relationship environments at home, school, work and other settings, and also explores relationships with peers and adults.

Module four (**Coping with emotions**): The module focuses on helping adolescents and youth to internalise the influence of emotions on their lives and how to ably manage them. Emotions are used as lenses that can help adolescents to better discover the meaning of the reality they are facing.

Module five (**Passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour**): The module details a tripartite behavioural comparison of passivity, aggression and assertiveness, to which each person belongs. Adolescents and youth are helped to critically examine where they most commonly fall, and how passivity and aggression can be two extremes that may not lead to positive healthy relationships. Young people are therefore helped to become more assertive through practical engaging activities.

Module six (**Growing up**): The module helps the participants to find answers to often disturbing questions of life, such as "what is happening to my body?," "What are all these changes that I am experiencing?," "Where am I going?," "What are my responsibilities?" Young people are prepared to transition into adulthood with a good understanding of gender, and culture along with the different stereotypes.

Module seven (**Communication**): The module focuses on how to help young people develop communication skills, which is the basis of all relationships. The character of a relationship is determined largely by the quality of the communication within it. That is why good communication is a skill that needs to be learned. In this module, we help adolescents and youth to understand how

they communicate and we equip each individual with the specific skills they need to communicate effectively.

Module eight (**Decision making**): The module focuses on how to help young people with skills that enable an individual to make informed decisions or choices without putting his or her life and the lives of others at risk. Specific areas emphasised under this module include: Problem solving (a skill that enables youth to identify problems and find ways to meet their needs and avoid conflicts and dangers), critical thinking and creative thinking. Being creative means that you have new ideas of doing things. Creative thinking is very important because young people have often been faced with unfamiliar situations under which they have to demonstrate ability to cope. Such situations also require application of creativity.

This participant was a mentor with DREAMS project training pupils in pads making.

Module Nine (**Substance abuse**): This module tackles terrible addictions affecting many young people today. The module offers adolescents and youth a more reliable and mature position in front of such challenges like alcoholism and other substance/drug consumption. Participants make reflections on why young people use drugs. They also identify commonly used drugs/substances by young people, discuss the signs and symptoms of drug use and how to avoid drug/substance abuse.

Module ten (**Reaching my goals and dreams**): The module helps to fine-tune fundamental needs (wishes, dreams, desires) thus enabling the youth to effectively plan for the present and the future, outlining how to realistically get there.

She weaves necklace beads, bags and makes liquid detergent for sale.

At this stage, they are expected to know where they want to go but the question they are assisted to answer is "how do I get where I want to go?" At this stage, redesigning of goals takes place as a result of the need to focus on them. This module enumerates

issues that can prevent young people from achieving their set goals and the various ways in which they can overcome the obstacles in the way of realising their goals.

Delivery methodology

The sessions use different Active Learning Methods (ALM) such as role play, discussion, surveys, games, quizzes, movies and other activities. The use of these methods demands that facilitators are comfortable using interactive methodologies while encouraging participants to participate. Some practice and preparation on the part of the facilitators is always encouraged. The ALMs in the manual do not demand writing and reading to the greatest extent possible. It is important that the ALMs, though enjoyable, are not viewed as just games. Discussion and review of thoughts, experiences and learning with the participants must follow. The broad review questions that are provided are not meant to be used verbatim. They are meant to remind the facilitator of the issues that should be discussed.

Selected works of creative writers, film makers, visual artists and even actual biographies of famous people are suggested to be used as tools to help young people further reflect and identify models in their lives, while at the same time paying attention to the skills they need to excel in life and be like or even surpass their role models. The materials and tools are meant to serve as a guide and therefore the facilitator has the prerogative to vary their use in accordance with the needs of the trainers. The facilitators are encouraged to add to the tools including any other works that they believe can help young people relate to the life skills manual more easily in the different contexts.

In the majority of the sessions young people are required to sit in a circle or semi-circle so that they can easily communicate with

one another. The facilitator has the option to sit inside or outside the circle. More often the facilitator is encouraged to sit with the participants either on the floor or on the chairs, as the situation demands. The facilitators, in addition, are encouraged to vary their delivery methods to ensure that the training not only keeps them attentive, but also interested. Variations in languages and the facilities available often necessitate use of creativity to ensure that all participants move together with the trainer. Feedback in form of suggestions, tips and experiences enables continuous improvement in the delivery of training.

An effort is made to adapt the sessions and activities to differences in the age of participants, though broadly they are suitable for young people between the age of 12 – 18 (adolescents) and 19-35 (youth). The exercises and challenges could thus be varied among the age groups. Life skills are learnt over a period of time and activities need to be repeated, perhaps with variations to reduce monotony, for real skills building to take place. A number of energisers and warm-ups were included to keep the participants attentive and interested.

Each of the ten modules on average was covered within a period of four hours. The time could be more or less depending on the actual length of the module. Longer modules were split into two. The entire training duration was 40 hours. Each group met for about four hours every week, making it possible to cover the training in 10 weeks.

Life skills facilitation standards

The Vijana life skills sessions were handled by two trainers at a time, preferably male and female. About 75 per cent of the participants in life skills training were drawn from SCORE direct beneficiary households. The rest were drawn from the wider community

without applying the strict selection criteria needed under the SCORE households. In school groups were training during co-curricular hours, weekends or holiday to avoid interrupting the regular school programme. Out-of-school groups were asked to select an appropriate time and venue for the training.

Monitoring and evaluation tools

All implementing partners engaged their life skills trainers to maintain an updated life skills training inventory and an updated database on the on-going/completed life skills groups. The database took into account information on each trainee's knowledge, behaviour and attitudes before and after the life skills intervention as measured using a pre-training and post-training life skills assessment tool (in the training manual). The major parameters targeted by this pre-post training assessment design included relationship building, conflict management, mood swings, communication skills and psychosocial wellness of the trainees. For every training session, trainers utilised the SCORE group activity attendance tool in which individual youth names and their corresponding individual and household level codes were indicated – allowing the activity to easily extract which youth from which households attended the training on the different dates.

Promising practices

- The use of a robust case management model that allows for mapping of needs and resources enabled better targeting of youth with life skills needs.
- The use of a robust data collection framework and tools enabled better tracking of youth participation, making it easier to link the outcomes with attendance.

- The use of the pre- and post-training assessment questionnaires enabled better documentation of the changes that the life skills training had enabled in the lives of youth.
- The programme targeted youth that needed the life skills most, that is the most vulnerable youth. Some of these were orphans, others had dropped out of school and some were in hard to reach areas within the selected districts. In Ntungamo District for example, APROCEL identified youth from known hard-to-reach hilly areas such as Rukona East, and parts of Itojo and Buhama Sub-counties. In Rukungiri, the life skills training targeted Nyakishenyi Sub-county which had several child-headed households, school drop outs and families devastated by HIV/AIDS.
- In addition, the programme provided assistance to youth that had needs that were not related to life skills. By focusing on life skills training for the youth, the programme also identified a critical need among a category of the population that faces the biggest life risks including the HIV epidemic and unemployment.
- The integration of social asset-based interventions like psychosocial support with life skills and combined social economic activities enhanced retention and improved life skills training outcomes.

Challenges and lessons

Despite the successes registered with the life skills training, the programme had some challenges which if addressed earlier on could have improved its implementation. These challenges and lessons include:

- The voluntary nature of the programme: Joining was purely based on one's interest and assessed needs. As a result, some youth especially boys disregarded it and simply went to play football or other games.
- Standardisation of training: Whereas the manual had standardised modules to be delivered over a defined period, we observed that the time allocated to the training varied. Some social workers trained for only two weeks while some youth argued that they were slow learners and therefore required a longer time to comprehend the modules.
- Mobilising the out-of-school youth was difficult in some cases, as majority are mobile/transitory and or engaged in work. In addition, some of the trainers in schools were teachers, who got transferred and lost contact with their trainees.
- There were complaints about travel, or distances from homes to schools/apprenticeship centres, especially in the hilly terrain of the south-western region and parts of east central region. The youth argued that the distances were too long and that this affected their attendance. It was also reported that some trained youth were not adequately followed up and it was therefore difficult to establish their progress.

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Chapter Six

Outcomes of the Vijana Life Skills Model on the Youth

Introduction

AVSI Foundation implemented a seven year (initially five, with a two-year extension) Vijana life skills training between 2009-2016 under the Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for vulnerable children and their families (SCORE) Project. The training aimed at promoting, encouraging and educating vulnerable Ugandan youth to lead positive and fruitful lives. It equipped young people with skills to deal with the challenges they face at various stages of their development. An evaluation was conducted in 2016 to measure the performance of the training interventions and the changes that accrued in relation to youths' behaviour, attitudes and practices. This section presents the outcomes and impact of the life skills training on youth in the SCORE project areas.

Girls in Mukono under the DREAMS project showcase their products in liquid soap making.

Study methodology

The evaluation study aimed at assessing the effects of the Vijana life skills training on the youth with emphasis on selected behavioural outcomes. A comparison-control group study design was used since no baseline survey had been undertaken for the programme. Evaluation data was collected from 10 SCORE project districts, namely: Amuru and Alebtong (northern Uganda), Ntungamo and Rukungiri (western Uganda), Sironko and Bududa (eastern Uganda), Luuka and Buyende (east central), and Kampala and Buikwe (central Uganda). The intervention group involved youth that benefited from the life skills training. The intervention group was drawn from among a total of 6,974 youths from 4,447 households that benefited from the training.

The control group comprised those that never received the training and residing in another sub-county within the study

district. Out of those trained, a sample of 349 (intervention group) youth was selected. A control group comprising 364 youth was also selected. The impact of the training was determined on the basis of a range of outcome indicators including relationship building (relationship map), conflict management, decision making, choices in relation to adolescent health (my body, growing up), managing emotions, communication skills, goal setting, and elements of resilience. Resilience in this case referred to bouncing back from a difficulty or exhibiting positive behaviours towards each of the nine skills.

The evaluation study was cross-sectional and applied a mixed methods design involving use of qualitative and quantitative approaches. It also incorporated youth-friendly and gender-sensitive methods of data collection allowing for participation and interaction of the youth. Study participants included the youth (male and female) mainly aged 12–30 years comprising the primary study population; key informants such as service providers (AVSI staff and implementing partner organisations that worked with the youth); parents/caregivers, teachers and officials on school management structures; child protection officers at sub county and district levels (probation and social welfare officers and community development officers); and local leaders. Data was collected using focus group discussions, key informant interviews and case studies. These complemented the initial review of relevant project documents such as the SCORE programming guide, life skills training manual, the project's logical framework and annual reports.

Outcomes of the life training intervention

AVSI's life skills training registered impact on youth behaviour. In this section, we present the changes in knowledge, attitudes

and practices among the youth linked to AVSI's four-category life skills set: coping and self-managemen, interpersonal skills, communication, critical thinking and decision-making skills.

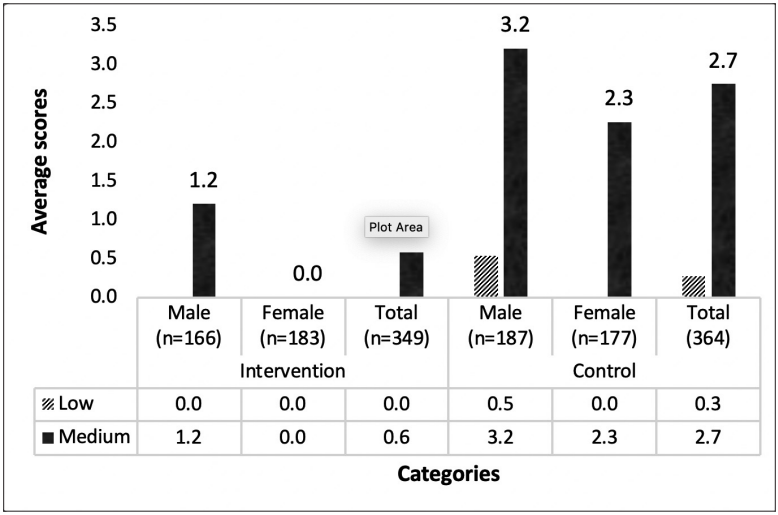
Changes in coping and self-management

A number of coping and self-management variables were assessed, including changes in relation to adolescent health and self-care, managing stress and emotions, and psychosocial wellbeing. The impact of life skills training on these variables follows:

Changes in relation to adolescent health and self-care

In order to assess changes in health and self-care, the youth in the intervention and control group were asked to respond to 14 positive statements on aspects of nutrition, personal hygiene, healthcare seeking behaviour for minor injuries and illnesses, personal protection, response to sexual abuse, and protection against STDs, among other factors. Each of the 14 statements had responses ranging from 1 to 6 (6 for "Strongly agree," 5 "Agree," 4 "Disagree," 3 "Strongly disagree," 2 "I do not know" and 1 "No response"). A total score ranging from 14 to 84 was obtained by summing up all the 14 responses, and the results are summarised in Figure 2. The average scores were computed and three categories created: low score (1-2), medium score (2-4) and high score (4-6). The distribution of these average scores between the intervention and control group is shown in Figure2.

Figure 2: *Average Scores for Youth on Self-Care Variables*



Results indicate that the mean difference between the average score from the intervention and control areas were significantly different from zero (intervention= 75.92, Control= 74.24, diff.= 1.68, p= 0.0013). The Fisher's exact test also shows that there was a significant association between self-care among youth in the different arms (intervention vs control, p= 0.000). This means that youth in intervention areas generally showed higher self-care compared to their counterparts in control areas.

Personal hygiene in terms of daily bathing and washing was another important self-care skill assessed. There was no significant difference in personal hygiene between the youth in the intervention and control group (p=0.779). However, the average responses for "strongly agree" for male and female youth combined and females alone were slightly higher in intervention areas (Table 6).

Table 1: *Personal Hygiene as a Self-Care Skill*

I bathe and wash up daily	Intervention (%)			Control (%)			P-value
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Strongly agree	73.9	87.4	81.0	75.8	84.2	79.9	0.779
Agree	24.8	11.5	17.8	20.4	15.3	17.9	
Disagree	1.2	0.5	0.9	2.7	0.6	1.7	
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.5	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.6	

FGD participants from intervention areas in the western and east central regions further demonstrated that they had better self-care skills following the training under the SCORE project. The youth mentioned skills relating to personal hygiene (bathing, brushing their teeth regularly, girls using sanitary pads, being smart and trimming long nails etc.), minding what they ate including the safety of the food and avoiding potentially harmful situations. The views from a number of female participants in the FGDs reflect improved self-care among the youth who trained. The comments included:

> Whenever we go in periods, we use sanitary pads and all girls must wear knickers because if we do not wear knickers, it can be very bad. If I care for myself, I can be happy … like here, girls, when we wear shoes, we look smart. (FGD with female intervention youth from Nkondo Primary School, Nkondo Sub-county, Buyende District).

> When I wake up, I wash my face, brush my teeth and start cleaning my house. After I am done with cleaning, I take a bath, then cook lunch at around 1pm I serve and we eat (FGD with female trained youth, Nyamayenje, Rukungiri Municipality, Rukungiri District).

> "I take care of myself by washing clothes, eating food and staying healthy. I care for myself by trimming nails and shaving hair, washing my clothes." (FGD with female intervention youth from Nabitaame Primary School, Nabitaame Village, Bulongo Sub-county, Luuka District)

Managing stress

The evaluation assessed young people's knowledge about the physical and emotional signs of stress. There was no significant difference in level of knowledge of the signs of physical and emotional stress between youths in the intervention and control group. However, the youth in the intervention group displayed better stress management skills compared to the control group – suggesting that the life skills training had equipped them with stress management skills through engaging in social activity and seeking psychosocial support from adults.

Table 2: *Stress Reduction Strategies among the Youth*

Stress reduction strategies	Intervention (N=349)						Control (N=364)						P-value
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Physical activity	100	60.2	68	37.2	168	48.1	107	57.2	85	48	192	52.8	0.179
Social activity	34	20.5	55	30.1	89	25.5	47	25.1	70	39.5	117	32.1	0.043*
Seek psychosocial help from a peer	37	22.3	42	23	79	22.6	39	20.9	29	16.4	68	18.7	0.226
Seek psychosocial support from an adult person	38	22.9	65	35.5	103	29.5	28	15	31	17.5	59	16.2	0.000*
Seek help from a health professional	4	2.4	11	6	15	4.3	8	4.3	15	8.5	23	6.3	0.217
Doing Nothing	2	1.2	2	1.1	4	1.1	8	4.3	4	2.3	12	3.3	0.053
Others (drinking water, take medicine, go out for a drink, take a shower, sleep, pray, ignore)	31	18.7	9	5.1	40	11.5	43	23	27	15.3	70	19.2	0.000*

Source*: Computations based survey data for the evaluation*

Table 2 shows that the majority of the youth in both intervention and control areas reported coping with stress by doing physical activities. More youth in the control group however went for a social activity as a way of dealing with stress with the difference significant compared to the intervention group (p= 0.043). Youth in the intervention group sought adult counselling when stressed, much more than their counterparts in the control areas, with differences significant (p= 0.0000). Some youth did nothing about stress. Other strategies the youth adopted included drinking water, taking medicine, going out for a drink, taking a shower, sleeping and praying.

Voices from study participants in the intervention group attest further to the impact of training on managing stress. One of the FGD participants in Western Uganda commented:

> For example if I have misunderstandings with my husband, it makes me feel very scared. So I do visit my mother in-law, talk about it and by the time I get back home, am free and not scared anymore. (FGD trained youth, Rukungiri District)

Another youth from the same area shared her experience on how to deal with stressful situations saying:

> You look for social occasions like churches, games or reach out to others to seek for advice and they make you forget your problems (FGD female trained youth, Rukungiri District).

Male youths from Eastern Uganda talked about the changes they had experienced following the training saying:

> I used to fight people who annoyed me but today, I go and attend to my garden" (Male FGD Luuka District). "Two years ago, I would beat whoever accused me falsely of anything but today I simply walk away" (Male FGD Luuka District). "When stressed I go gardening (FGD with trained male youth, Bududa District).

These voices echo the skills the youth had acquired in stress management following the life skills training. The strategies varied from fleeing away from troubling environments to seeking psychosocial assistance from elders on how to manage stressful conditions.

Youth and psycho-social wellbeing

At the start of implementing the life skills training programme, AVSI asked the training youth a range of questions about their living conditions and how they viewed the future. Afterwards the youth responded to the same set of questions. The evaluation assessed the pre- and post-training responses to these questions to evaluate how the training had influenced the youths in psycho-social well-being. The youth showed tremendous improvement on a range of psycho-social wellbeing indicators based on pre-training and post-training assessment (Table 9).

Table 3: *Selected indicators of psychosocial wellbeing: pre and post- training*

Item	Male (%)			Female (%)			Overall		
	Pre-test	**Post-test**	**Sig Level**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**Sig Level**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**Sig Level**
I do not feel stressed and worried	52.2	80.3	***	54.3	79.6	***	53.3	80.0	***
I enjoy doing things	81.6	89.2	**	79.8	92.0	***	80.6	90.6	**
I do not feel like crying	53.3	80.9	***	53.8	82.2	***	53.5	81.5	***

I can shake off sad feelings	58.4	83.4	***	56.7	84.5	***	57.5	84.0	***
I feel life is worth living	78.2	89.7	**	80.9	90.7	**	79.6	90.2	***
I have hope for my future	82.3	92.2	**	81.7	93.6	***	82.0	92.9	**
I feel good about myself	81.2	91.4	***	82.7	94.1	***	82.0	92.8	**
My health is good	72.3	87.5	***	75.8	91.2	***	74.2	89.4	***
I do not feel tired these days	52.4	77.8	***	54.7	82.4	***	53.1	80.2	***
I feel people like me	65.0	87.3	***	68.2	87.6	***	66.6	87.4	***
I feel confident	63.9	89.2	***	63.9	88.6	***	63.9	88.9	***
I feel able to solve problems in my life	52.0	86.4	***	54.7	85.3	***	53.4	85.8	***
I am able to make decisions in my life	56.4	86.4	***	58.6	89.7	***	57.6	88.1	***
I want to be around friends and family like usual	74.5	88.9	***	75.9	93.3	***	75.2	91.2	***

I do not get into more trouble than usual	61.3	88.1	***	63.7	91.5	***	62.6	89.8	***
I do not get so angry these days	65.2	86.7	***	61.6	90.2	***	63.3	88.5	***
I get along well with other people	73.6	88.6	***	73.3	91.5	***	73.4	90.1	***
I am able to make friends	79.4	90.8	***	79.4	93.8	***	79.6	92.4	***

Source: *Computations based on AVSI life skills training programme M&E data*

The Level of Significance is given as ***P<0.001, **P<0.05, *P<0.10.

Table 3 shows that there were improvements in the participants' psychosocial wellbeing between the pre- and post-life skills training period. Overall, the estimated effect of the training on psychosocial score significantly improved by 9.067 (pre = 50.897 Vs post= 59.964). When we further explored the combined effect of sex of the participants and region on life skills training using analysis of variance (ANOVA), region of the participant had a significant effect on life skills training (Psychosocial) (F=25.54, p<0.001).

Overall, from the participants' responses (Table 3), it is discernible that on nearly all attributes, the youth scored better. The results in Table 3 demonstrated that the youth made

significant improvements in their psychosocial wellbeing from exercising self-restraint, finding solutions to their problems and to issues concerning decision making. Other changes included appreciating the essence of sharing issues of concern with persons considered as significant sources of psychosocial help and/or apply defence mechanisms like sublimation.

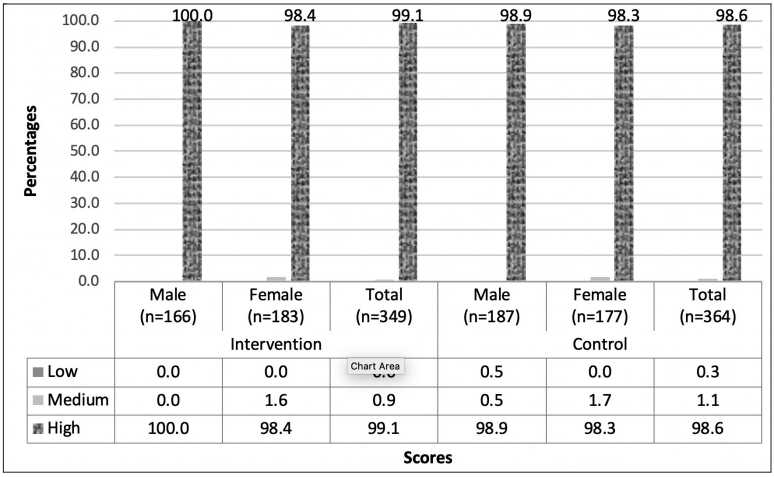
Changes in interpersonal skills

Key variables assessed included changes in relationship building and changes in conflict management.

Changes in relationship building

Assessment of changes in relationship building and management skills was done using nine positive statements. The statements included ability to speak up for oneself, acting in social situations, make friends, show respect to people, [have] friends that make one feel valued and worthwhile, [connect] adults that give care or can be talked to, [build] violence-free relationships, [have] knowledge of signs of an abusive relationship, and showing care to others. Each variable had responses ranging from 1 to 6 (6 "Strongly agree," 5 "Agree," 4 "Disagree," 3 "Strongly disagree," 2 "Don't know," and 1 "No response"). A total score ranging from 9 to 56 was obtained by summing up all the nine responses. Whereas results from the t-test indicate that the difference between the average score from the intervention and control were significantly different from zero (intervention= 49.27, control 48.56, diff.=0.712, p= 0.0316), the differences by gender were not that significant (Figure 4). The scores were categorised into three forms: 9-18 (low), 19–36 (medium) and >=37 (high).

Figure 3: *Average Scores for Relationship Building and Management among Youth*



The statistics for ability to speak out for oneself and to show respect to people with differing beliefs and opinions between youth in intervention and control areas was generally not significant across the given Likert scales. However, more youth from the intervention group strongly agreed that they were better placed to apply both skills. Results further show that more female than male youth in both intervention and control areas strongly agreed that they would comfortably speak up for themselves, while fewer female youth from control areas strongly agreed that they knew how to respect people of different beliefs, opinions and cultures.

The youth further indicated that following the training, more people now understood them better, unlike before. They were able to show signs of building relationships such as working together, being friendly and enjoying stronger relationships with their parents or close relatives.

Despite the above improvements in relationship building among the youth, there was evidence that youth from intervention areas were still resistant to talk openly about some personal issues such as their bodies, adolescence changes, and personal relationships. For example:

> When you do wrong and they beat you, you cannot tell your friends… I cannot tell him [friend] about my girlfriend because I may not trust him… (FGD with male trained youth from Rwesingiro Village, Kikarara Parish, Bwambara Sub-county, Rukungiri District).

Similar views were expressed by female youths. In one FGD, a female participant revealed that she remains secretive regarding relationships, saying:

> Being with a boyfriend and I tell my fellow girls, they can easily take him away from me. So I cannot tell them. (FGD with female trained youth from Rwesingiro Village, Kikarara Parish, Bwambara Sub-county, Rukungiri District).

Changes in conflict management

To assess study participants' conflict management skills, we were partly guided by their responses to four statements: getting into more trouble than usual, getting so angry and fighting, getting along well with parents/guardians, and getting along well with other people. The findings on getting into trouble more than usual and getting so angry and fighting showed statistically significant differences between the intervention and control groups.

Table 4: *Youth conflict and trouble management skills*

	Intervention (%)			Control (%)			P-Value
	Male (n=166)	**Female (n=183)**	**Total (n=349)**	**Male (n=185)**	**Female (n=176)**	**Total (n=361)**	
I get into more trouble than usual							
Strongly agree	4.2	4.9	4.6	13.0	6.3	9.7	0.027
Agree	23.5	26.8	25.2	20.0	28.4	24.1	
Disagree	42.8	41.5	42.1	43.8	36.9	40.4	
Strongly disagree	29.5	26.2	27.8	21.6	26.1	23.8	
Don't know	0.0	0.5	0.3	1.1	1.7	1.4	
No response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.6	
I get so angry these days, I get into fights							
Strongly agree	4.2	3.9	4.0	9.7	6.8	8.3	0.025
Agree	8.5	12.2	10.4	17.3	8.5	13.0	
Disagree	52.1	50.8	51.4	44.3	45.5	44.9	
Strongly disagree	35.2	32.0	33.5	27.0	35.8	31.3	
Don't know	0.0	1.1	0.6	1.1	2.8	1.9	
No response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.6	
I get along well with my parents/ guardians							
Strongly agree	69.3	66.5	67.8	69.6	69.9	69.7	0.471

Agree	25.3	28.0	26.7	22.3	24.4	23.3	
Disagree	4.2	3.3	3.7	6.0	4.0	5.0	
Strongly disagree	1.2	2.2	1.7	1.1	1.1	1.1	
Don't know	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.6	
No response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.3	
I get along well with other people							
Strongly agree	59.6	64.6	62.2	57.6	66.7	62.0	0.979
Agree	36.1	31.5	33.7	39.1	29.3	34.4	
Disagree	3.6	2.8	3.2	2.7	3.4	3.1	
Strongly disagree	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.3	
Don't know	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	
No response	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.3	

Both male and female youth in control groups had more scores on "strongly agree" for the two variables. By interpretation, although the male and female youth in both areas got into trouble, those in intervention areas were less likely to get in trouble and were less involved in fights than their counterparts. This is an indication of the positive effect of the life skills training on youths' conflict management skills.

Qualitative views from FGDs with some youth and caregivers from the south west, central and east central regions indicated that while young people who trained in life skills get angry and engage in fights, they have learnt to manage their disagreements better through seeking friendlier, peaceful and reconciliatory means.

For example some of the youths in the FGDs revealed how the training had impact on their anger management, saying:

When I warn them and they don't change, I ignore them. You leave that person to be. You forgive and leave them." (FGD with Male Youth, Nabitaama Primary School, Nabitaama Village, Bulongo Sub-county, Luuka District).

Another in-school youth from Western Uganda commented:

> For instance, if someone takes your pencil and a row breaks out between you, you keep quiet and then later tell him that 'you took my pencil' after he has cooled from anger… If he admits, you get it from him and let him decide to remain your friend or to quit (FGD with intervention male youth, Itojo Central Primary School, Itojo Village, Itojo Sub-county, Ntungamo District).

The evaluation also found that many youth have learnt to handle conflicts by talking to or asking adults, their parents or guardians and persons in authority to intervene. Others preferred to report to the police, saying it would help them settle fights or conflicts amicably. To the contrary, most of the youths in control areas exhibited avoidance, withdrawal and violent reactions when angry.

Changes in communication skills

The variables considered under communication included: ability to find right words for self-expression, whether or not youth felt understood by other people, whether or not they felt frustrated when not understood, if they tried to explain if not understood by others, their level of socialisation, ease or difficulty with speaking in public or in front of many people. Youth in the intervention and control groups were rated on a three-item scale of "Never," "Sometimes" and "Yes" against the different communication variables considered. The findings reveal that there is no significant

difference in the communication skills of the youth in intervention and control areas. For example, an almost even number of youth from the two areas admitted that they never felt they could not find the right words to express themselves. However, there were gender differences within the intervention group; more males than females felt they could not find the right words to express themselves while the reverse was true in the control group.

The study revealed further that a relatively bigger proportion of female (43%) than male (40%) youth in the intervention group perceived that other people often misunderstand them. On the other hand, more males than females in the control group held such a perception. Generally observed is that in both groups, the percentage of youth that perceive to often be misunderstood in their communication is big, averaging 41.1 per cent (intervention group) and 39 per cent (control group).

However, an analysis of the pre-test and post-test life skills training results for communication skills showed that there were significant improvements in the performance of youth in the various domains of communication (see Table 5).

Table 5: *Pre-test and post-test results for selected communication skills*

Item	Male (%)			Female (%)			Overall		
	Pre-test	**Post-test**	**p-value**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**p-value**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**P-value**
Do you often feel that you cannot find the right words to express yourself?	25.5	16.3	0.002**	30.4	14.5	0.001***	28.0	15.4	0.001***

Do other people often misunderstand you?	22.7	18.5	0.158	28.4	15.0	0.001***	25.7	16.7	0.001***
Do you feel frustrated when others don't understand you?	41.6	32.6	0.011**	46.3	34.5	0.001***	44.0	33.6	0.001***
Do you try to explain when others don't understand you?	45.0	49.6	0.210	39.8	56.2	0.001***	42.3	53.1	0.001***
Do you often try to stay away from socialising?	19.0	20.4	0.632	20.1	17.5	0.346	19.6	18.9	0.727
Do you try not to talk to others during social occasions?	18.7	16.6	0.454	18.8	16.7	0.436	18.7	16.7	0.303
Do you like to be alone most of the time?	16.3	10.6	0.023**	18.6	12.2	0.012**	17.5	11.5	0.025**
Do you feel it's difficult to make yourself understood?	21.7	11.7	0.001***	22.6	13.7	0.002**	22.2	12.8	0.001***
Do you feel it's very difficult to speak up front to many people?	23.6	14.7	0.002**	26.4	9.7	0.001**	25.1	12.1	0.001***

Are you often considered weird, unsocial or something similar?	18.4	12.8	0.036**	20.3	11.6	0.001***	19.4	12.2	0.001***
Do you try to be as quiet as you can in public?	21.8	14.7	0.012**	25.9	13.5	0.001***	24.0	14.1	0.001***

Source: *Computations based on AVSI life skills training programme M&E data*

The Level of Significance is given as ***P<0.001, **P<0.05, *P<0.10.

Table 5 shows the status of communication skills prior to and after training the youth in life skills. Generally, there were improvements in the participants' communication between the pre- and post-life skills training period (t=15.167, p=0.001). Overall, the estimated effect of the training on communication score significantly improved by 0.175 (pre = 3.078 Vs post= 2.903) on the absolute difference scale. On average, both male and female participants demonstrated better communication after life skills training (Male: 21.9 Vs. 18.9; Female: 22.2 Vs. 18.81). Regionally, the eastern region demonstrated poorer communications skills compared to other regions. The south western region was the best performing region. When we further explored the combined effect of sex of the participants and region on life skills training using analysis of variance (ANOVA), region of the participant had a significant effect on life skills training (communication) (F=29.43, p<0.001).

Thus, whereas the comparison between the intervention and control groups revealed no significant difference in communication

skills, significant differences were clearly visible between the pre-test and post-test done by the intervention group. This means that the project identified the right beneficiaries that clearly needed life skills training.

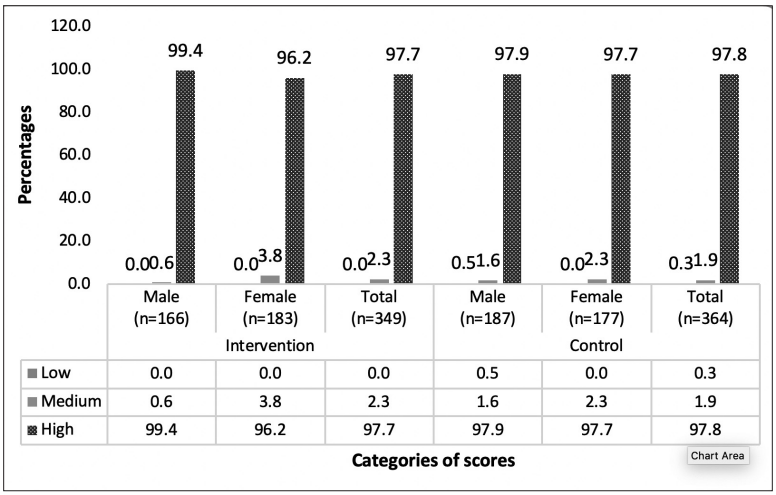
The above findings notwithstanding, youth reported that there are some aspects of life they were still struggling to openly communicate. Particularly, issues related to sexuality, sexual illness, opposite sex adolescent relationships and wrongdoing remained silent topics. They were yet to gain confidence and readiness to share these topics with caregivers and, in some cases, with peers.

Changes in critical thinking and decision making skills

Critical thinking and decision making skills

Participants were asked seven questions geared towards measuring critical thinking and decision making skills among the youth. The questions included thinking about how their choices impact on others, dealing with anger without damaging others or damaging things, consensus in group decision making, considering others views before making a decision, considering others' before making a decision, feeling able to solve problems in life, and ability to make decisions in life. A score was generated by summing up the responses to the seven questions and it ranged from 7 to 42. The t-test indicated that the difference between the means was not significantly greater than zero (intervention=36.41, control =35.94, diff=(.47, p= (0.0928). See figure 4.

Figure 4: *Changes in critical thinking and decision making skills*



Source: *Survey data*

A higher proportion of youth in intervention areas strongly agreed that they think about how their choices impact others (43.6% v 40.5%), with male youth recording higher percentages in both intervention and control areas than their female counterparts. However, differences in responses regarding the ability to make decisions in their lives were significant between the two groups (p=0.002). More male youth in intervention areas strongly agreed that they were able to make decisions in their lives (51.9% versus 39.2%).

Envisioning the future: Looking Forward

This was another variable assessed. Looking forward was concerned with youth envisioning their lives in future. Eight positive questions were posed to the study participants on whether they can influence how their lives will turn out, their vision as successful adults, good relationships with trusted adults,

using their experience to help other youth, whether they believe relationships with others will help them succeed, readiness for the next phase of their lives, pride in the way they are living their lives and whether they felt they had control over their lives. Each variable had responses ranging from 1 to 6 (6 "Strongly agree," 5 "Agree," 4 "Disagree," 3 "Strongly disagree," 2 "Don't know," and 1 "No response"). A total score ranging from 8 to 48 was obtained by summing up all the eight responses. The scores were categorised into three forms as 8-16 (low), 17–32 (medium) and 33 and above (high). The results from the t-test indicate that the difference between the average score from the intervention and control were not significantly different from zero (intervention= 43.52, control = 42.87, diff .647). Thus, in terms of looking forward, male and female youth in intervention and control areas scored almost the same. The average scores were similar and closer to the maximum score of 48 points. This implies that both groups had a better understanding of what they wished to be in future in terms of life goals and ambitions, even without the life skills training.

Young people and substance abuse

Indulgence in substance abuse formed another crucial aspect of critical thinking and decision making. This was assessed based on how often the youth had consumed alcoholic beverages in the past one week, as well as their thoughts on drinking alcohol and using drugs. Asked how often they had consumed alcoholic beverages in the past week, slightly more youth from intervention areas said they had not consumed alcohol at all (99% versus 95.3%), with females being more than males. Findings further revealed that there were more youth from control areas who admitted that they had consumed alcohol once or twice or three to four times in the

past week, and every day. In respect to using drugs, there was a significant difference in the opinions of the youth in intervention versus control areas, with a higher percentage of youth from control areas thinking that using drugs was very responsible, very good, very trendy and healthy. It was further found that the majority of those who thought that using drugs was not responsible and very unhealthy were from intervention areas.

Most significant changes

The life skills training for young people by AVSI and partners emerged as a game changer for many beneficiary youths across the 35 targeted districts. A number of changes accrued from this intervention as so far shown. Among the various changes, the most significant are reflected here. These are drawn from the AVSI SCORE change stories (2011-2015) and included the following:

Reducing risky behaviour

The training impacted positively on the participants' level of self-confidence, esteem, self-worth and boosted their decision making power and quality. This particularly helped the female youths resist peer pressure, gain sensitivity to risky behaviour and hence, consider engaging in more productive ventures. The experiences the youth shared during the FGDs are illustrative of these changes. One female youth giving her experience said:

> I was timid and could not take decisions on my own which caused young boys to coerce me into early sex (A formerly shy 20 year old female youth).

This female youth, following the training, learned how to make good decisions, distanced herself from peer pressure and started engaging in productive ventures such as goat rearing.

In another case, one 21 year old female youth from Kazigo village, Luuka District shared that:

> I fought with my friends for boys and turned the surrounding bushes to my hiding place with males.

Prior to the training, this youth had become a problem for her parents who felt defeated. When an opportunity to attend a life-skills training arose, she joined and her life changed for the better. By her own testimony, she acquired self-respect and self-worthiness skills and she became a peer champion, impacting on her fellow youths in her community.

Denouncing substance abuse and associated bad behaviour

Some youths reached by the life skills training had committed to substance abuse, including alcohol and tobacco. Some of these testified to denouncing substance abuse and significantly changing into responsible persons involved in productive activities, as observed below:

> I was a smoker, took alcohol and was involved in petty thefts at a lake-side market when my dad sent me out of home. When I came across the life-skills training, I thought it was a waste of time but slowly picked interest and learnt to reflect on myself and how to become a responsible and productive youth. I have gained the trust of my parents, established a brick-making and bicycle repair business which enabled me to buy a plot of land on which I have constructed my house and started my own family." (A 25 year old male resident of Kikondo village in Buikwe District)

For this youth, the life skills accorded him a second chance to reunite with his family.

Another pair of males, both aged 26, following the life skills training put an end to substance abuse and other bad behaviour

and started a cultural group that benefits them and other youths in their locality in Rukungiri District.

> We are now leading a cultural group - Lake Edward Cultural Performers - in Rukungiri District, where we give hope to fellow youth especially orphans to return to or stay in school through drama performances.

Other young people involved in substance abuse engaged in multiple risky behaviour such as prostitution, stealing and selling people's property. In one case, a 27 year old female in Rukungiri District and a known prostitute at a fish-landing site abused drugs. Often hyper, she was involved in fights with males and females alike, leading to her imprisonment on account of assault. Her behaviour only changed after attending a life-skills training where she learnt to live a transformed life. By the time of the evaluation, she had since started sensitising other youth through drama to abandon bad behaviour and live productive lives. Similarly, a 17 year old deeply involved in drug abuse and delinquency was a celebrity among his peers that recognised him as "Betting chairman." Having benefitted from the life skills training, he took an active position in his community of leading the anti-betting and anti-drug abuse campaign among youth in his community.

> I lead the anti-betting and anti-drug abuse campaign among the youth in my community.

This boy started a farming business and harboured big plans of owning cows, goats and becoming a commercial farmer in future.

Other youths had run away from their homes, having been accused of bad conduct, while others used to steal neighbours' food and animals, and sell them to raise money to buy local brew and cigarettes. The life skills training programme enabled these youth to change for the better.

Young people making mature decisions

Prior to participation in life-skills training, many young people made decisions that depicted immaturity and irresponsibility. Some decided to get married at a very young age, spent their money on alcohol and "trendy" clothes, and literally did not have defined life goals. However, following exposure to soft life skills and practice apprenticeship training, their decision making improved significantly and so did their perception of life goals. The following remarks illustrate the registered changes:

> Before the training, I would use my earnings to buy alcohol for friends and get myself fancy clothing. I did not value making savings – (A 17 year old carpentry trainee in Ntungamo).

This trainee later graduated, got employment at a carpentry workshop from which he started earning. Having attended the "Reaching your goals" life-skills module, he started his own carpentry business in Ntungamo District.

In a similar case, a 19 year old female decided to get married when her parents who lived in a small village in Isingiro District could not afford to pay her tuition fees, and so she dropped out of school in primary seven. Luckily she enrolled in the AVSI apprenticeship training programme (tailoring) which gave her not only practical skills but also self-esteem and a restoration of hope. Through her earnings from tailoring, she started providing for her family and supporting her sibling in school. She bore plans to build a permanent house for her mother and install a solar lighting system.

Some youths completely reformed from the bad influence of their peers after attending the life-skills training.

> I said "no" to bad peer influence after attending life-skills training which shaped me into a responsible person. I am a youth leader at our Catholic parish and I own a six-acre tomato garden from which I plan to earn income to pay myself for an

> electrical installation course in a couple of months and provide for my four siblings and widowed mother. (A 21 year old youth from Buikwe District).

These and many other young people changed and matured in their decision making.

Coping with teenage pregnancy

In Uganda, teenage pregnancy means many things to the affected girls and involved boys. The reactions vary from individual to individual. Some get into self-destructive practices, running away from home, unsafe/crude abortion, dropping out of school for fear of shame, and so on. However, evidence suggests that life skills training offered to the youth helped the affected girls and some boys to cope with teenage pregnancy. Some have gained self-esteem and have returned to school after delivery.

In brief, the life skills training made young people better persons of great value to themselves, their families and communities at large. They became more resilient, got in control of their lives and improved relationships with their families.

Sustainability of the interventions

The Vijana life skills training programme worked through partnerships with established institutions such as the District Community Development Officers, probation officers, the police and village chairpersons; community based facilitators (CBFs), village health teams (VHTs) and community action teams (CAFS), who were trained using the cascading model; and implementing partners, mainly NGOs that were well known in the communities. The majority of the trained youth can supplement their daily incomes utilising the apprenticeship and soft skills attained through the life skills training.

The involvement of the district technical team meant that it is possible for the youth groups to be integrated into the district strategic plans and programmes.

The implementing partners of this programme were CSOs operating in the targeted/participating districts. As part of the sustainability and exit strategy, the implementing partners had started customising the life skills model into their own programmes using their resources and working with the same community and government structures that the SCORE project had worked with.

Key observations and way forward

Knowledge of life skills among the youth

Knowledge about life skills changes with training. Youth from both the intervention and control groups showed variations in the life skills that they were knowledgeable about. Seventy eight percent (78%) of the youth from the intervention area (n=349) were able to identify more than one life skill they were knowledgeable about as compared to only thirteen percent (13%) from the control area (n=364). Table 6 shows the various skills areas that the youth mentioned. The differences in knowledge about the various life skills between the intervention and control group were statistically significant nearly across all 15 categories listed in favour of the intervention group. This could point to the effect of the training. The youth in the intervention area were particularly more knowledgeable about skills such as: having good social manners (or relating well with others), building friendships, self-awareness, having self-esteem, being assertive and coping with stress. Within the control group, the youth also identified nearly the same skills, although a few more identified decision making. While it is plausible that youth in the control area could have been applying the life skills in real life without awareness that what they apply are

actually life skills, this cannot account for the statistically significant difference observed between the intervention and control groups. Exposure to life skills training by the control group greatly influenced knowledge about the same.

Table 6: *Knowledge of life skills by the youth*

	Intervention			Control			P-value
Life skills categories	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	
Coping with emotions	31.6	44.3	38.1	13.8	16.7	14.9	0.04
Self-esteem	36.8	47.9	42.5	17.2	27.8	21.3	`0.000
Assertiveness	30.8	45.7	38.5	10.3	5.6	8.5	`0.000
Self-awareness	37.6	52.1	45.1	24.1	11.1	19.1	`0.009
Ability to cope with stress	27.8	51.4	39.9	17.2	11.1	14.9	`0.023
Good social manners	74.4	75	74.7	24.1	33.3	27.7	`0.000
Building friendships	47.4	52.1	49.8	17.2	38.9	25.5	`0.020
Peer resistance skills	27.8	30	28.9	6.9	5.6	6.4	`0.002
Effective communication	27.8	26.4	27.1	10.3	0	6.4	0.001
Critical thinking	7.5	7.1	7.3	3.4	0	2.1	0.201
Creative thinking	9	7.9	8.4	13.8	0	8.5	0.358
Decision making	27.8	22.1	24.9	24.1	16.7	21.3	0.171
Problem solving	18.8	15.7	17.2	6.9	16.7	10.6	0.926
Others	13.5	8.6	11	31	5.6	21.3	0.088
Total (n)	133	140	273	29	18	47	

Source: *Computations from survey data*

In addition, altogether more female youth had knowledge about individual life skills such as coping with emotions, self-esteem, good social manners and building friendships, while more male youth demonstrated knowledge of skills such as assertiveness, self-awareness, ability to cope with stress, peer resistance, effective communication, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving.

The difference in knowledge about life skills between youth in the intervention and control groups could be linked to the life skills training that imparted knowledge on most of the life skills the youth need to navigate the life challenges they experience as they transition to adulthood.

There were a number of areas where the differences between the trained youth and the control group were not statistically significant. This, on the one hand, pointed towards other sources of information the youth in non-intervention areas could have accessed, including the cultural upbringing that delivers certain sets of skills to the young people. Thus, the youth in the control group also scored highly in skills categories such as relationship building. It can also be interpreted that since AVSI and partners targeted the very vulnerable youth who indeed needed life skills, following the training, these youth were thus enabled to compare with their counterparts in the control group.

Despite the tremendous benefits resulting from the training, some modules of the life skills training programme were not well comprehended by some targeted youth and so may not have benefitted them much. Notable among these is coping with emotions, demonstrating assertive behaviour, effective communication, decision-making, and envisioning the future. Little information was also delivered to help young people deal

with sexuality issues, including sexual and reproductive health, prevention of pregnancy, and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Others relate to issues of gender, vulnerability of the girl child, and young people and physiological changes. All these, therefore, deserve more attention.

The fact that the trained youth commonly fronted farming or agricultural skills as life skills speaks a lot about the integration approach used by the project in engaging the youth. The project integrated life skills training with farmer field schools, junior farmer field schools as well as apprenticeship training. It is however evident that agricultural skills training and apprenticeship training, which offered practical instruction, appear to have been appreciated more and easily remembered compared to the elements within the soft life skills training.

References

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Chapter Seven

Selected Life Skills Programmes by Other Players in Uganda

Introduction

This chapter presents the life skills programmes in Uganda implemented by state and non-state actors. Some of the government programmes identified include: life skills education for primary schools in Uganda and life skills education for young Ugandans in secondary schools. Other plans are integrated in mainstream education. Among non-state actors, life skills training predominantly takes a standalone approach with a few infused in broader interventions. We present programmes by private-not-for-profit sector organisations such as BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities), ARISE in Uganda, Enterprise Uganda, Lindner Foundation Uganda, Plan International, to mention a few. Primary data from state and non-state actors implementing or responsible for the provision of life skills, is used in this chapter, complemented with secondary data.

This participant gave birth to her baby when she was 15. Thanks to the life skills training, she is back in school.

Public sector life skills initiatives

Life skills education for primary schools in Uganda

Invoking the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All, and the 2000 Dakar World Education Conference on Education For All (EFA), the Ministry

of Education and Sports in 2011 embarked on deliberate efforts to accord primary children a holistic education package that enables them to learn to know, to do, to live together and to be. As a strategy to consolidate life skills education in primary education and to support learners to acquire these life skills, the ministry sought to empower teachers with sufficient and appropriate content on life skills and values. This gave rise to A Teacher's Handbook on Life Skills for Primary Schools in Uganda (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011). This handbook articulates various skills sets including: Skills for knowing and living with oneself (self-awareness, self-esteem, assertiveness, coping with emotions, and coping with stress), skills for knowing and living with others (relating with others, negotiation skills, empathy, managing peer relationships, effective communication, and non-violent conflict resolution skills), skills for decision making (creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving), life skills such as earning a living (alternatives of earning a living, entrepreneurship, functions of entrepreneurs, and factors to consider before starting a business) and leadership skills.

The assumption is that "a teacher equips his/herself with the competences they require to handle facilitation of life skills' development among pupils during the teaching and learning process" (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011, p. 1). Teachers are encouraged to integrate/infuse life skills in the education curriculum. They are urged and guided through this handbook to pass on these skills to their primary school learners.

However, whereas the publication of this handbook demonstrates government's commitment to life skills training of primary school children, there are a number of concerns to contend with. First, there is no explicitly defined subject called life skills as the case is for mathematics, English, social studies, science, literacy

and so on. Instead, any training of learners in life skills only comes as an integrated measure. Secondly, with the excessive emphasis on achievements of grades and passing from one level to another, it is unlikely that teachers commit adequate time to life skills training aware that assessment of their performance in no way factors in their contribution to life skills training but the number of learners that have passed from one grade to another. Thirdly, the role of the media in glorifying grades especially when the PLE (Primary Leaving Examinations), UCE (Uganda Certificate of Education) and UACE (Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education) results are announced rather than according due space to other positives of the education system and practice (in this case to include, say best performers in life, vocational and technical skills) raises a key concern. The Ministry of Education and Sports, the media and society's perceptions in general share the blame for the price being paid for excessive focus on grades. Fourthly, while the then Permanent Secretary in his foreword to this Teacher's Handbook put it that "it is the hope of the Ministry of Education and Sports that tutors in Primary Teachers' Colleges and teachers in primary schools will use the life skills curriculum and this handbook effectively to improve life skills education in primary schools," to date, there is no evidence base on whether or not the curriculum is being delivered. Besides, the Permanent Secretary's submission in no way obliges tutors in Primary Teachers' Colleges and teachers in primary schools to live to this expectation.

Life skills education for young Ugandans in secondary schools

Boys in the DREAMS project show their skills in chalk making.

A series of initiatives have been in place serving as flagship life skills programmes targeted at young people in Uganda. These include: the School Health Education Project (SHEP) which was a component of the 1985-1989 and 1990-1995 Uganda Government/UNICEF Country Programmes (Republic of Uganda and UNICEF. (n.d)). Among other things, SHEP aimed to influence a reduction in STD and HIV infection among the youths aged 6-20 years. The other initiative was the Early Life Skills Initiatives. This was a UNICEF initiative in the 1990s throughout the whole Eastern and Southern Region of Africa (ESAR) aimed at addressing the neglected needs and life skills for children and adolescents in educational programmes in and out of school and building the capacity of young people to confront

the crisis caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other social problems young people face (Ibid).

The Basic Education, Child Care and Adolescent Development Intervention (BECCAD) is another life skills initiative. This was implemented within a framework of the 1995-2000 Uganda Government/UNICEF Country Programme that stressed the promotion of positive behaviour change with emphasis on women, children and adolescents. This programme aimed at "promoting full cognitive and psycho-social development of children and adolescents within a supportive family and community environment which is conducive to education for all, prevention of HIV/AIDS/STDs, adequate care and protection of children and adolescents from birth to adulthood" (Ibid).

The Life Skills for Young Ugandans — Secondary Teachers' Training Manual provides a list of life skills that young people in secondary schools ought to acquire. These are: skills of knowing and living with oneself (including self-awareness, self-esteem, assertiveness, coping with emotion, and coping with stress), skills of knowing and living with others (including interpersonal relationships, friendship formation, empathy, peer resistance, negotiation, non-violent conflict resolution, and effective communication) and skills of making effective decisions (including critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving).

The Life Skills for Young Ugandans — Secondary Teachers' Training Manual emphatically calls for the infusion of life skills activities into the syllabi of secondary schools, colleges and institutions. However, life skills training for young people in secondary schools is not void of the concerns identified with life skills education in primary schools.

Initiatives by non-state actors

Here we present interventions (life skills models) by different actors including their respective: target populations(s) and justification, challenges/problems of young people that they address, theory of change, reported achievements, challenges and lessons. These are captured in the table that follows:

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
PeerLink Initiative Uganda Web link: http://www.segalfamilyfoundation.org/portfolio-items/peerlink- initiative-uganda/ ***Area of operation: Rukungiri***	**Name: Community library and empowerment centre model.** • Uses a multi- sectoral approach, works through a community library and empowerment centre. • Focus on soft skills as the starting point including interpersonal orientation, induction, mental toughness and communication skills for a month. For out-of- school youth, the soft skills are followed by practical skills such as tailoring and baking. • For in-school youths, their package of soft skills includes sexual and reproductive health and education. • Works with teachers and health workers in delivering life skills training. • Essentially runs a network of school- and community-based peer educators.	• Both in-school and out-of-school youth. • Children. • Women. • Age bracket: 12–25 years old but sometimes take on a few women above 25 years. Justification • Children should start getting exposed to reading at an early stage. So they are helped to learn the skill early in time. • Youths as adolescents need sexual reproductive health education, soft skills like multimedia crafts, gardening and ICT.	• Low self-esteem among pregnant teens and young mothers. • Lack of sexual reproductive health education as a cause of teenage pregnancy. • Lack of information on reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, hence community library services.

	Theory of change	**Achievements**	**Challenges**	**Lesson**
	• Change as a process is gradual. To achieve it, different platforms through which different community stake holders are brought on board to support or influence what young people do. The community library is the place of continuous dialogue, interaction between the different stake holders. Stakeholders include: youth, their parents/ caregivers, teachers and health workers. The family and community are looked at as a strong supportive structure.	• Increased community involvement and interest in affairs and issues that affect the youth. • Have created a point of reference for youth services and support. • Increased peer-peer engagement, consultation, support and accountability. • Some youth trained have got jobs, others self-employed. • Community members are embracing reading in the community library.	• Difficulty with sustaining project interventions. • Resource challenges to scale up to achieve critical mass. • Small project coverage.	• It is very important to engage the community stake holders throughout the planning and implementation. • Working with and building on existing structures like the sub-county and health centres works. • It is important to document what you do and share the best practices with others and disseminate the success stories.

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
Women of Purpose http://www.keycorrespondents.org/2012/05/18/woman-of-purpose-transforming-and-empowering-womens-lives-in-uganda/ **Area of operation:** Pallisa district & Kampala slum areas of Kiyaaye-Nakulabye and Makerere Kivulu	**Name: Empowering communities to develop their potential.** • Runs a home of pregnant teenagers. The organisation receives abandoned pregnant teenagers that have nowhere to go. It also receives referrals from police, community workers and other NGO's. Appreciating that one of the reasons these teenagers find themselves in this situation is lack of life skills, Women of Purpose trains them in life skills such as critical thinking, decision making, self-awareness and self-worth. Provision of these skills is also premised on the observation that by the time most of the girls get to this organisation, they are broken, cannot think straight, have feelings of self-hatred, and cannot make sound/right decisions. Alongside life skills training, the teenagers are given parenting skills. • The organisation also runs community-based life skills training targeting youth in slums. This is aimed at addressing the challenges of youth from a preventive vantage. • Life skills training takes different approaches including: delivery of sessions/lessons to in and out of school youth, drama, group and individual counselling, group training, and devotion.	• Young girls including pregnant girls in and out of school girls. The in-school girls are supported to stay in school while the out of school girls are supported to cope and reasonably face life positively. • Sometimes boys are also reached though the organisation's primary target population are girls. **Justification** • While all young people are vulnerable, young girls are more vulnerable, at greater risk than boys. They face a myriad of challenges that communicate lack of and need for life skills	• Teenage pregnancy. • Forced early marriage. • Dropping out of school. • The causes and effects of all the above including feelings of self-hatred, poor decision making, low self-esteem, self-judgment of worthlessness, poor decision making.

	Theory of change	Achievements	Challenges	Lesson
	Society and families (parents) through a lens of social and gender norms harshly judge girls. For girls that fall victim of teenage pregnancy, if not supported and empowered with life skills, this marks the end of their dreams. By empowering these girls with life skills, they are given a new beginning, their hopes are restored, and are enabled to bounce back to pursuing their life dream. They are helped to cope and face life more positively and responsibly. For in-school girls, life skills are a gateway to, remaining in school and maintaining their career dreams	• Many girls abandoned by their families due to pregnancy are picked from the streets, taken in, rehabilitated, their families traced, engaged through counselling, resettled and accepted by their families. • Reported behaviour change among resettled girls. • Life skills training done in communities has contributed to keeping children in school. • Has helped to engage girls on sensitive topics such as sexuality, sexual reproductive health, relationships with the opposite sex among other topics that parents find complicated handling with their adolescents. This has helped to bridge the parenting gap	• Financial challenges to facilitate personnel involved in delivery of the model, mobilisation of young people, reaching out to them. • Higher expectations from communities. There is a community belief that NGOs have money. So targeted youths and their families have monetary expectations	• Many people take life skills for granted and assume that young people know what to do yet they do not. • We expect so much from young people yet we give them very little life skills training especially from families and schools. • When someone acquires life skills, they do so much in their lives and they become much better people.

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
Reach a Hand Uganda Address: Plot 7502, Block 244, Heritage Village, Kansanga Web link: http://reachahand.org/index.php/projects/125-peer-educators-academy-pea	**Name: The Peer Educators Academy hosted by Victoria University.** • Equips young people in and out of school between the ages of 17-24 years with information and skills on Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) & other life skills to support their peers. • Involves running a full year fellowship programme which starts with a one month long intensive training of peer educators. These are trained using a module based on SRHR information and life skills. • Successful applicants are taken through a one month intensive training at a selected venue in Kampala at a service fees of UGX 200,000 and commit to the programme for the full year. • At the end of the training, the trained & equipped peer educators are distributed in different communities, schools, community based organisations and other partner organisations. • The training has three components i.e. life skills, behavioural change, lastly, how to empower young people with the life skills and behavioural change skills. These skills are tailored to helping young people know who they are.	• Young people between 12–24 years. • In-school youths, that is secondary school, and tertiary institutions. • Out-of-school youth. • Both rural and urban locations but majorly, the urban areas. **Justification** • Young people have a lot of information that is not correct. They have a lot of myths and misconceptions e.g. about condom use, drug abuse, family planning etc. • Young people have great need for information and services on sexual reproductive health but they don't know where to access it.	• Teenage pregnancy. • Early and unprotected sex. • High rates of school drop-out. • Inaccurate information. • Drug abuse. • Undue desire for independence. • Managing relationships. • Intimate violence. • Providing information on where to access youth friendly services and other protection services for example in case of violence.

	Theory of change	Achievements	Challenges	Lesson
	For the 50 peer educators trained, if each one is having sessions with 20 young people in a school, and after every session, each of these 20 young people can at least impact 2 or 3 other young people with a given skill they have acquired from the session, and then those three go on to pass on the message to one or two, change can occur. Emphasis is placed on young people receiving correct and consistent information.	• Between 2014 and 2016, a pool of 230 peer educators successfully underwent a one-month training. • These are well equipped, working in 70 schools in the central, eastern and western region.	• Challenging/restrictive environment e.g. the parliamentary ban on sex education without giving tangible and feasible alternatives to addressing the life challenges of young people that were being addressed through sex education. Some of these include helping young people to find answers to their struggles of identifying who they are. Then the wrong perception that once 18 years old, one can do anything they want yet many do not have the right information, They cannot therefore make independent decisions.	• Young people are dynamic, different and everyone grows at a different rate, hence approach them with such knowledge. Do not wait for the young person to look for you to get the information they need but reach out to them. If you wait for them, some may never come out and the cancer of life challenges they face will advance. Others will never be comfortable seeking out for you as a service provider. It is important to always reflect on the barriers to young people's access to services. Partly and largely, the answer lies in life skills.

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
Reach a Hand Uganda (continued) ***Areas of operation*:** Nationwide but with targeted communities in Mpigi, Luwero, Nakaseke, Wakiso, Mukono, Kampala, Mbarara, Iganga, Jinja, Mayuge, Butaleja, Bududa, Kapchorwa, Amuria, Katakwi, Gulu, Amuru and Lira.	Works with youth groups in schools and communities. So the peer educators are attached to schools; and in schools, they work with teachers. Within small groups/families, the youths conduct peer learning sessions. Within communities, the organisation works with VHTs alongside peer-educators. VHTs are used because they are considered to command respect and trust in communities. This is contrary to young people. Parents would be skeptical seeing young people coming to their homes claiming to be peer educators. They would be seen as young people who have come to spoil their children. The third platform is online: The consult plus website. It specifically gives young people correct information but also has a list of referral points (health facilities where young people can access these services).	• Urban youths targeted more because they are more exposed to tempting and challenging situations on a day to day basis. Every day, something comes up into their life. E.g. teenage pregnancy rates are higher in urban than rural settings. Sex, drug abuse is more common among urban youths than rural youths.	• Linking young people to service points with youth friendly and protection services.

	Theory of change	Achievements	Challenges	Lesson
	The organisation acknowledges the possibility of distortion of information in the process. However, it contends that if the interaction process continues where for instance, each individual peer-educator interacts with young people on a daily basis, weekly basis, and so on, at least by the end of one month, three months or a year, there will be a set of skills that will have been impacted among the young people reached. Once young people receive correct information and express need for youth friendly services, they are referred to government and private health facilities under the partnership arrangement with Reach a Hand Uganda.	• Every year, an average total of 1000 learning sessions are held each with a group of 25 young people.	• Mistaking sex education for homosexuality.	• To reach out to young people, working with the existing structures in the community including the family, religious and cultural institutions is indispensable. These enhance sustainability.

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
BRAC Web link: http://www.brac.net/uganda Contact: Plot -90, Busingiri Zone, off Entebbe Road, Nyanama, Kampala, Uganda Tel: 256 (0) 414 270978. E-mail: bracuganda@brac.net	**Name: Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA).** The programme accords adolescent girls from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity for a better life through mentorship, life skills training and microfinance. It has six components — three are social and three are economic. These are all community based. Under the social components are adolescent clubs of 25-30 girls each. Model girls are identified to lead the clubs as adolescent leaders, mentors. These are normally school drop outs. The club acts as a basis for the training and other activities such as livelihood, life skills, music, sports, drama, and poetry sessions. The economic components include livelihood training, apprenticeship and financial literacy.	• Girls aged 10-21 in and out of school. But predominantly out-of-school youths.	• Teenage pregnancy. • Early marriage. • HIV/AIDS and other STI's. • Problem solving • Communication. • Negotiation skills. • Responsibility of adolescents to their community. • Knowing yourself, issues of living a happy and healthy life as an adolescent girl.

	Theory of change	Achievements	Challenges	Lesson
	When girls are provided with key life skills, they will be able to manage their bodies, live a happy and healthy life and then in the end, be productive. Such a girl will be able to live in harmony with others, resist certain challenges, and peer pressure. At the end she will be productive and add value to the people around her, and herself.	• Some mentor girls, after gaining experience in the various skills graduate into something else even outside BRAC. Some become health promoters, VHTs, etc. their confidence levels are much elevated. • Evaluations of BRAC Model in Uganda and beyond have revealed reduction in early entry into marriage, increased knowledge on family planning, increased knowledge on sexual and reproductive health (girls knowing themselves, how to manage their bodies), the number of targeted girls starting up businesses or economically independent has increased.	• Drop out of really good mentors already trained. Some change locations or get better opportunities for work. • Cultural barriers especially in Karamoja where girls are not given much importance. • The effect of nomadic life in Karamoja. E.g. a club is started, it picks up but once the dry season comes they shift. • Adolescents do not easily make up their minds especially in areas of economic empowerment. Months into the apprenticeship programmeme after the local artisan has been identified, paid, items procured, the adolescent changes her mind that she does not like that trade • Difficulty tracking the girls after they are graduated. Some move away from their communities.	• It is very important to have programmes for out-of-school girls. This somehow compensates for their being out of school and at times delays their entry into marriage. • Using peer educators or adolescent leaders works better compared to using organisation staff. The girls actually create stronger links with their peers than with older people. They look at older people as people who will judge them, people who don't understand them. • Soft skills component of life skills alone cannot do much for youth out of school if not complemented with livelihood support or economic empowerment/ practical vocational and apprenticeship skills.

Name of organisation	Name and description of life skills intervention/ programme	Target population & justification	Challenges/ problems of young people addressed
Straight Talk Foundation (STF)	STF is a behaviour change communication agency that envisions a world where the young people have access to sexual and reproductive information and are able to make meaningful decisions. They package information aimed at helping young people manage their life challenges. Packaged information is provided in form of face to face, print (newsletters), audio (radio), electronic (SMS, Facebook), etc. Face to face interactions with young people take place in schools, and communities. Print messages are packaged in Straight Talk and Young Talk. E.g. while Straight Talk might be talking about how to deal with teenage pregnancies, Young talk might be talking about getting to know your body.	• Young people of 12-29 years. **Justification** • Age 12 on average is when a young person starts developing into a man or woman and lots of challenges set in. Adolescence takes on. And so there is need to guide them as early as that. • But young people of 9 and 10 get involved but those are rare cases. These are given information appropriate to their ages. Young talk targets this group.	• Information gap, diagnosis and treatment of particular illness.

	Theory of change	Achievements	Challenges	Lesson
	Behavioural change interventions take an ecological model. At the centre is the young person whose functionality is hinged on the bigger system and sub system in which he/she operates. Those systems may include for example, the local government, policies, school environment (counsellors, we have the senior men and teachers) at that level. So once those subsystems are well equipped with what it takes, they feed into each other, support each other and the young person's life is affected.	• Contributed to the knowledge levels for young people in this country • Contributed to reduction in the school dropout rates of young girls and boys, attributable to reduction in teenage pregnancies. • Some young people were mobilised out of schools to form clubs in the communities, have seen these clubs grow into community based organisations.	• The task is bigger than one can imagine. Sometimes "we do not have anywhere to start… the family has turned away." • Financial challenges such as dependency on donor funding characterised by change in donor focus. "There is less and less money that is moving into HIV related behavioural change issues. They are not seeing as much change. In terms of locality targeting, donors have changed focus. They are looking at Karamoja. But we are looking at Busoga having very high pregnancy rates, teenage pregnancy rates, but no one is seeing that." • Difficult policy environment characterised by delayed school health policy. This means absence of a framework to guide sex education in schools. Besides, government recently banned sex education. • Challenges with sustainability.	• Working with young people requires you to get back to being young. This is in terms of the way they think, their needs, interests, language, etc. • Appreciate the challenges that they go through, do not blame them. Do not play the blame game. • Linkages/collaborations with other people, other players. The needs of young people may well stretch beyond the service package a single agency provides. Success of a programme partly depends on collaboration with government (local or central, depending on the level of implementation). • Keep abreast with what is going on at the national and local levels e.g. in terms of policy so as to remain relevant in the bounds of laws, regulations and guidelines. "…you might be working down in Kitgum, but your antenna should be high"

As observed, life skills training programmes are uniquely designed and implemented by different agencies. Variations are seen in terms of content, focus, target beneficiaries, geographical scope, goals, cost borne by beneficiaries, and depth. The varying life skills programmes offer a range of insights into design, relevance and impact. In the same way, the anticipated and reported impacts thus vary from programme to programme and agency to agency.

One cross-cutting concern across the life skills programmes implemented by the different non-state actors is their durability and sustainability. For a number of the life skills interventions, their implementation hinges on availability of donor funding; they are project-based and rarely firmly bring parents and community members on board to permanently be the vanguards of passing on the life skills to their children at an even early age during which children's behaviour and personalities can easily be shaped.

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Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Recommendations

Cognisant that by and large the problems and challenges young people face in Uganda are contingent upon lack of life skills, investment in popularising and delivery of life skills training targeting young people cannot be overemphasised. It is a welcome idea that AVSI Foundation and other actors have embraced in Uganda. Indeed, there are all reasons to prioritise life skills as an integral part of young people's education and behavioural change. There is evidence that the subject of life skills training for young people gained greater attention in Uganda especially in the 1990s following the Early Life Skills Initiative yet to date, the life skills gaps are very glaring among many young people in Uganda.

In view of the Early Life Skills Initiative, UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional programme held a regional workshop in Entebbe, Uganda in June 1994 with the aim of reaching a common understanding of the concept of life skills, how it could be adapted to the African situation, and how life skills could be integrated into current programmes (Republic of Uganda and UNICEF. (n.d)). Uganda moved a step further by holding a national workshop in the same year in Jinja to discuss

life skills further in the local context. This workshop yielded key suggestions, including: a) developing a life skills programme based on the current needs and problems of Ugandan youth; and b) infusing life skills activities into current syllabi in use in schools and colleges than to have a separate life skills curriculum (Ibid). The above notwithstanding, the loud silence about life skills in schools in Uganda relative to other curriculum content tells a lot about the under-prioritisation of and underwhelming emphasis on this indispensable education sub sector.

In the same vein, the many challenges that young people face today are a clear testimony that life skills are yet to register a buy-in among the school and non-school communities. It is a demonstration of schools' prioritisation of acquisition of knowledge in examinable subjects at the expense of other core aspects of the human personality and development necessary to prepare young people for the complex nature and challenges of our world today.

It is thus worth appreciating and supporting interventions and models such as those implemented by AVSI Foundation to this effect. Learning from the AVSI life skills training model and a range of models by other actors, the following recommendations are advanced.

- Any life skills training project ought to devise sets of incentives capable of keeping youth motivated to receive life skills training to the end. Blending soft and hard life skills packages can be more helpful. Under the AVSI model, integration of agriculture and other forms of training was one of the strategies that made it possible to ensure retention of trainees. However, the integration requires strengthening.

- Innovative methods that allow for flexible time schedules could make it possible for different categories of the youth to attend life skills trainings. The most important considerations ought to be ensuring that all modules are covered without compromise.
- The mode of delivery of the training is another issue that requires attention. Learning from the AVSI life skills training model, whereas the training manual catered for standardised modules including time allocated for training, during the roll out of the training, time used for training varied from one area to another. This could significantly impact on the way different youth derive benefits from the training. Thus, flexibility needs to be integral to the delivery of training content, making due considerations for the context and characteristics of youth targeted.
- The role of parents, families and communities in passing on the life skills to their children at an early age during which children's behaviour and personalities can easily be shaped ought to be appreciated by any life skills training programme. Until it is appreciated, these actors are bound to be side-lined with the mind-set that life skills are for children, adolescents and youth. Yet the state and non-state actors can barely substitute the role of parents, families and communities in this endeavour.
- The age range of life skills interventions ought to include children younger than 12 years. It is agreeable that the challenges of adolescents aged at least 12 and youth are unique and thus worth prioritising especially where resources are limited and thus call for rationing. However, it is equally important to appreciate that some of the challenges that adolescents and youth face emanate from having been ignored in their early and younger childhood years in terms of exposure to life skills

training. It is imperative therefore that children younger than 12 years are equally prioritised.

- The negative/passive role played by the media in glorifying pupils/students who have excelled in Primary Leaving Examination, Uganda Certificate of Education and Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education alongside their teachers and schools deserve revisiting. The media ought to equally accord due space to other positive aspects of the education system and practice including glorifying best performers in life, vocational and technical skills alongside their teachers/trainers. The media should more positively engage in propagating the value of life skills.
- Related to the above, it is high time the Ministry of Education and Sports and society at large rethought glorifying grades and despising important benchmarks, namely, vocational, technical and life skills as almost non-issues for success in education. The current trend characterised by speeches that vocational, technical and life skills education matter as much mainstream vertical education represent a double standard on the part of the Ministry of Education and Sports given the commitment accorded to the former as seen through budgets, infrastructures, bursaries, and shaping of community attitudes and perceptions.

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Empowering Vulnerable Youth in Uganda focuses on life skills interventions in Uganda. It is a guide to understanding the meaning, scope, approaches and models of life skills and draws the attention of stakeholders to the concept. It provides practice-based scholarship to various stakeholders engaged in youth activities. It offers research-based evidence on effective youth life skills training programmes, models used, and lessons they offer as well as the various approaches tried, tested and documented. Based on data from interface with stakeholders in Uganda it presents lessons in the planning and delivery of life skills training programmes as well as resources.

The Authors are researchers, educationists and practitioners from Makerere University and AVSI Foundation.

The book will benefit schools, parents, youth, civil society, policy makers, government agencies, academia and other stakeholders.

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