



The Partnership
to Strengthen Innovation
and Practice in
Secondary Education



Mathematica

BUILDING YOUTH LIFE SKILLS

LESSONS LEARNED ON HOW TO DESIGN, IMPLEMENT,
ASSESS, AND SCALE SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING

Swetha Sridharan, Poonam Ravindranath, Emma Pottinger, and Clemencia Cosentino



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education (PSIPSE) is a collaboration of funders and partner organizations seeking to catalyze innovation and systemic change around access to quality and relevant secondary education globally. Supporting the development and testing of innovative solutions to challenges facing the most marginalized, since 2012 the Partnership has given over \$60 million to over 60 organizations moving the needle on secondary education in eight countries.

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- ActionAid Nigeria
- Aga Khan Foundation (India)
- Aga Khan Foundation (USA)
- American India Foundation
- African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)
- Century Entrepreneurship Development Agency (CEDA) International
- COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa (CIYOTA)
- CorStone
- Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM)
- Educate!
- Education Development Center (EDC)
- Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI)
- Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE)
- Milele Zanzibar Foundation
- Plan International
- Stichting Aflatoun International
- Voluntary Service Overseas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Education for All Initiative launched in 1990, there has been growing recognition that young people need more than academic knowledge to cope effectively with day-to-day challenges and transition successfully into employment (Dupuy et al. 2018). Over and above the skills they gain through a formal education and other technical or vocational skills, they need **"life skills," a set of cognitive, personal, and interpersonal strengths that position them for success in their lives and livelihoods.** Life skills can strengthen young people's agency and resilience, and predict a range of long-term outcomes, including health, job performance, and wages (Kwauk et al. 2018, Kautz et al. 2014).

To give youth access to these vital tools for success, the Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education (PSIPSE) has been supporting its grantee organizations to test diverse approaches to strengthening life skills. **This study analyzes the experiences of the 18 PSIPSE life skills projects, and generates actionable lessons around the design, delivery, measurement, and scale-up of life skills programming for youth in developing countries.** The study draws on in-depth interviews with grantees, document review, and a scan of the literature and policy context. Provided below is a high-level description of the projects examined in this study, and a summary of the key lessons that emerged from the analysis.

THE PSIPSE'S LIFE SKILLS PORTFOLIO

The PSIPSE supported 18 life skills projects that adopted a range of goals and intervention approaches, focused on different sets of life skills, and paired life skills programming with a variety of other interventions. They operated in diverse policy environments across three regions and seven countries.

GOALS: PSIPSE life skills projects were designed to advance a continuum of secondary education outcomes. Several focused on participation, seeking to boost primary-to-secondary transition rates, prevent dropout, and foster school completion. A few focused on improving academic learning outcomes, viewing life skills development as a pathway to this overarching goal. In addition, many aimed to prepare youth for entry into the workforce. Overall, regardless of where projects were in the secondary education continuum, they sought to position youth to make informed, independent decisions about their lives.

INTERVENTION APPROACHES: The majority of PSIPSE life skills projects implemented standalone life skills sessions. These took place for the most part "outside" of the educational system, with sessions held after school or during the weekend (though in some scale-up projects, sessions were integrated into the class schedule). The sessions included a variety of interactive activities and were implemented by teachers or by external facilitators contracted by grantees. A subset of the grantees aimed to strengthen life skills through core academic subjects. They typically trained teachers to implement active learning techniques while teaching core subjects like English and mathematics, in order to cultivate key interpersonal and higher order thinking skills among students.

TARGET LIFE SKILLS: The life skills that PSIPSE projects worked to strengthen included (1) cognitive skills, which are higher order thinking skills needed for analysis and decision making, (2) personal strengths, which are needed for awareness, drive, and self-management, and (3) interpersonal skills, which are skills for interacting effectively with others.

PSIPSE PROJECTS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

- ActionAid Nigeria, **Nigeria**
- Aga Khan Foundation (India), **India**
- Aga Khan Foundation (USA), **Kenya**
- American India Foundation, **India**
- African Population and Health Research Center, **Kenya**
- Century Entrepreneurship Development Agency International, **Uganda**
- COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa, **Uganda**
- CorStone, **Kenya**
- Creative Center for Community Mobilization, **Malawi**
- Educate! **Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya**
- Education Development Center (EDC) – Akazi Kanoze 2, **Rwanda**
- EDC – Measuring Skills at Scale, **East Africa**
- Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative*, **Kenya, Tanzania**
- Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, **Uganda**
- Milele Zanzibar Foundation, **Tanzania**
- Plan International, **Nigeria**
- Stichting Aflatoun International, **Tanzania**
- Voluntary Service Overseas, **Tanzania**



*Also implemented in Côte d'Ivoire.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER INTERVENTIONS: PSIPSE projects often pair their life skills interventions with other strategies that advance their overarching goals, including vocational training, career awareness programming, parental sensitization, and interventions to improve academic learning.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE: PSIPSE projects operate in India, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. These present relatively varied contexts for implementation in terms of (1) their progress in developing and implementing policies to cultivate youth life skills, (2) whether they implement a stand-alone Life Skills Education course, integrate life skills development into the existing academic curriculum, or do both, and (3) how much they focus on values and content (for example, health topics), as opposed to skills.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1. SYSTEMATICALLY DIAGNOSE THE LIFE SKILLS YOUTH NEED. Several PSIPSE grantees did not have a clear vision of the skills they sought to develop, which introduced risks to program effectiveness. Promising strategies for identifying life skills (undertaken by a small group of grantees), include: (1) theory of change development, which entails “backwards mapping” from goals to intermediate outcomes to the skills youth need to achieve those outcomes and goals; and (2) needs assessments, which can help pinpoint life skills that young people need to navigate their specific circumstances.

2. MODIFY HOW CORE SUBJECTS ARE TAUGHT IF DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS ACROSS A LARGE POPULATION, BUT OPT FOR STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS FOR MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS WITH SPECIALIZED NEEDS.

Having core subject teachers modify their pedagogy or otherwise change classroom practices is the most scalable way to strengthen life skills. However, while this approach can help develop higher order thinking skills and certain interpersonal skills like communication, it may be less effective in building personal strengths and other interpersonal skills (such as social awareness and negotiation), which are

of paramount importance for vulnerable youth populations. For these groups, a standalone life skills curriculum may be the best fit. Providing these youth with the devoted attention and support of a mentor, and giving them the space to reflect on their interests and aspirations, can help significantly boost their resilience.

3. TO FOSTER SCALABILITY, RECRUIT TEACHERS TO CONDUCT STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS, BUT PROVIDE RIGOROUS CAPACITY-BUILDING TO ENSURE THEY CAN ACT AS GOOD FACILITATORS. PSIPSE grantee experiences indicate that external mentors bring certain advantages to life skills sessions (for example, they often have more time and interest in life skills). However, grantees found that teachers, among whom there is lower attrition, were often more reliable point persons. Tasking teachers with implementing these sessions also brings the benefit of scalability. A key constraint in having teachers facilitate life skills sessions is that they are more comfortable providing information rather than eliciting insights and opinions—an important step in building young people's self-realization, confidence, critical thinking skills, and communication skills. It is vital, therefore, to offer strong trainings and other capacity-building supports to teachers that offer practical techniques for facilitating rather than teaching life skills sessions. The trainings would ideally also use interactive, hands-on techniques and stress that they are covering a new and thought-provoking topic. This could help attract and maintain interest among teachers, who tend to be disenchanted by the prospect of "just another training".

4. GIVE TEACHERS A STRONG INCENTIVE TO CULTIVATE LIFE SKILLS WHILE TEACHING CORE SUBJECTS—POTENTIALLY BY MODIFYING EXAMINATIONS TO TEST FOR THESE SKILLS. Introducing learner-centered pedagogical methods—the main approach PSIPSE grantees use to cultivate life skills through core subjects—is a difficult ask of teachers in developing countries. They are overburdened, often underpaid, and have rote learning methods deeply ingrained in their approach to teaching. It is critical, therefore, to offer incentives to teachers to modify their pedagogical approach. Examinations offer a strong vehicle for change in teachers' mindset and pedagogy. Because teachers are held accountable for examination results, modifying these assessments to test for higher order thinking skills can motivate teachers to cultivate these skills—through active learning methods or other techniques.

5. WHEN THE GOAL IS TO PREPARE YOUTH FOR EMPLOYMENT, COMBINE LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTIONS WITH HARD SKILLS OR VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND OTHER DIRECT LINKAGES TO THE WORK FORCE. Pairing life skills interventions with vocational training, on-the-job training, and/or internship placements can help increase demand for and interest in the overall program. This strategy also (1) offers youth a platform to apply and strengthen their life skills and (2) helps them obtain and succeed in longterm job placements. Indeed, research suggests that those who participate in programs that have an integrated focus on life and hard skills perform better in the labor market.

6. BUILD STRONG MIXED-METHODS EVALUATIONS INTO LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS THAT ARE BEYOND THE PILOT STAGE—THEY CAN FOSTER PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND SCALE-UP AND ADD TO THE GROWING KNOWLEDGE BASE. Many PSIPSE life skills projects were at the pilot stage and making substantial design modifications on the basis of what they were learning, and thus did not prioritize evaluation. However, more established projects could have benefited from integrating evaluations. Building evaluations into program plans can provide critical insights to program implementers as they identify target life skills, refine program models and assess scalability. Evidence of program effectiveness can also help make the case for scale-up to government officials. Finally, rigorous evidence would be an important contribution to the literature on life skills in developing countries. Issues that need further exploration include (1) the effectiveness of life skills programming in improving academic and psychosocial outcomes, (2) the long-term impacts of life skills development for youth, and (3) the sustainability and scalability of life skills programming.

7. ADVOCATE FOR PROGRAM SCALE-UP AT THE RIGHT TIME, USING THE RIGHT VOCABULARY AND RIGOROUS

EVIDENCE. Among the PSIPSE focus countries, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda all have life skills-related policy or curricular efforts that are in the early stages or planned for the near future. The time is right, therefore, for organizations in these countries to engage with government, and to contribute their knowledge and experience to life skills efforts. They may also be in a strong position to promote the scale-up of their own promising life skills programs. PSIPSE grantee experiences yield a series of lessons about how to successfully advocate for scale. In particular, they highlight the importance of (1) using the right vocabulary to explain life skills and “make them real” for policymakers, (2) generating and sharing evidence of program effectiveness, and (3) enlisting the support of influential donors in increasing policymaker interest in life skills.

8. CAREFULLY STREAMLINE PROGRAM COMPONENTS FOR SCALE WHILE ENSURING THEY ARE NOT DILUTED.

Government officials assigned to roll out an external organization's program often have limited time and resources to do so and may lack the needed expertise in cultivating youth life skills. A few PSIPSE grantees overcame this challenge and supported the government's effort to scale their programs by streamlining and simplifying individual program components—such as teacher training, ongoing capacity-building, and monitoring. While streamlining is vital, it is imperative not to oversimplify a program or discard components that could compromise program effectiveness. In refining life skills programs for adoption by the government, organizations would ideally identify the minimum program intensity and dosage needed to deliver impacts at scale.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the Education for All Initiative launched in 1990, there has been growing recognition that young people need more than academic knowledge to cope effectively with day-to-day challenges and transition successfully into employment (Dupuy et al. 2018). Over and above the skills they gain through a formal education, and other technical or vocational skills, they need “life skills,” a set of cognitive, personal, and interpersonal strengths that position them for success in their lives and livelihoods. Life skills can strengthen young people’s agency, improve their psychosocial well-being, and position them to negotiate and overcome the complex challenges they face in the 21st century (Kwauk et al. 2018; OECD 2018). Mounting evidence suggests, further, that life skills can predict a range of long-term outcomes for youth, including health, job performance, and wages (Kautz et al. 2014). Life skills are also in high demand in the labor market. Employer surveys and qualitative research conducted across a range of African countries reveal that employers seek—and often fail to find—workers with communication skills and the ability to work in teams, who are reliable and punctual, and who show commitment and initiative (Filmer and Fox 2014).

To leverage the growing momentum around life skills and give youth access to these vital tools for success, the **Partnership to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education (PSIPSE)** has been supporting its grantee organizations to test diverse approaches to strengthening life skills. To draw out learning



The **PARTNERSHIP** to Strengthen Innovation and Practice in Secondary Education

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from the experiences of these organizations, the PSIPSE commissioned Mathematica Policy Research to conduct an in-depth study of its life skills programming. The vision was to harvest a set of action-oriented lessons that education stakeholders could use to improve and expand their work. Specifically, the study is intended for practitioner and policymaker audiences that are interested in building, implementing, and scaling strong life skills programming, as well as donors who are looking to advance this field and provide useful guidance to their grantees.

We identified 18 projects in the PSIPSE portfolio that were engaged in developing life skills among their target populations in South Asia (India); West Africa (Nigeria); and East Africa (Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). Based on a scan of the literature, in-depth interviews with project staff, an intensive review of project documents, and a review of the policy context, we generated a set of lessons on the development, rollout, and replication of life skills programming for youth in developing countries.

This report summarizes the findings from our analysis. Chapter 2 outlines the study approach. Chapter 3 provides

a brief scan of the relevant literature. Chapter 4 offers a snapshot of the projects included in the study. Chapter 5 presents cross-cutting lessons on the design, delivery, evaluation, sustainability, and scale-up of life skills interventions. Chapter 6 summarizes lessons and discusses implications for policy and programming.

2 STUDY APPROACH

This study aimed to generate useful lessons from the work of PSIPSE grantees on how to strengthen life skills among marginalized youth in developing countries. It drew on reflections and insights from staff at PSIPSE grantee organizations doing this work on the ground—about what has worked well, what has been challenging, what they would do differently in hindsight, and advice they would share with others engaged in this work. Below we specify the learning questions the study sought to answer, and provide more detail on the methods used to gather and analyze the relevant data and develop key findings.

LEARNING QUESTIONS

The study sought to answer learning questions aligned with sequential stages of project development and rollout, including (1) design of life skills development programs (inclusive of all the strategic choices that must be made at the start of a program), (2) implementation or delivery of life skills programming in the field, (3) measurement of life skills and evaluation of the effectiveness of life skills programming, and (4) sustainability and scale-up of successful programs. Figure 2.1 provides these learning questions, as well as detailed sub-questions.

FIGURE 2.1. Study Learning Questions

DESIGN	WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED REGARDING THE DESIGN OF LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do grantees define life skills? What specific skills do they deem necessary for youth as they embark on life after secondary school? • What are promising strategies for strengthening life skills? • How should life skills development models be adapted for different target populations? • What are approaches for mainstreaming gender into life skills development models? • What lessons can be learned about integrating life skills development with other education- or youth-focused interventions?
DELIVERY	WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED REGARDING THE DELIVERY OF LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have grantees identified strong facilitators? • What are promising strategies for strengthening facilitation skills? • How have grantees built strong enabling environments for life skills development programs?
MEASUREMENT	HOW DO GRANTEES MEASURE THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do grantees measure improvements in life skills? What frameworks have been useful and less useful, and what measurement challenges have grantees faced? • What influence have these programs had on life skills and students' academic, employment, and life outcomes? • Given the strength and pervasiveness of the culture of examinations across target nations, could examinations be modified to motivate a focus on life skills and ultimately strengthen these skills? What are lessons and ideas around how examinations can be leveraged as a vehicle for positive change in education and a more holistic approach to skills development?
SCALE	WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED REGARDING THE SUSTAINABILITY & SCALE-UP OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have grantees ensured the continuity of their programming beyond the grant period? • How have grantees partnered with the government to scale their life skills programming?

METHODOLOGY

This study relied on multiple data sources, including in-depth interviews with grantees, project documents, evaluation reports, and external sources (including academic literature, policy documents, and reports describing the life skills policy landscape in PSIPSE focus countries). The specific steps we took to collect and analyze data and develop the lessons are described below.

LITERATURE SCAN We conducted a high-level scan of the literature around life skills development in Africa and Asia. Note that this was not a systematic literature review. Rather, it was a scan of relevant evidence to (1) inform our study focus and design (especially the questions we asked of grantees) and (2) shed additional light on our key findings. Chapter 3 provides more detail on the approach to the literature scan.

PROJECT SELECTION We identified projects engaged in life skills development (n=18) based on (1) a review of project documents, (2) responses from a grantee survey conducted in 2017, (3) interviews with grantees for a study focused on in-service teacher training in 2017, and (4) input from the PSIPSE donors. Figure 2.2 lists the projects included in this study. Chapter 4 provides additional detail on the goals, intervention approaches, and target populations of these projects.

POLICY CONTEXT SCAN Based on desk research, grantee interviews, and conversations with in-country life skills experts, we sought to develop a high-level understanding of the policy context around life skills in the countries where study projects were operating. Chapter 4 includes a brief summary of the policy landscape in these seven countries.

DOCUMENT REVIEW We reviewed project planning documents (including proposals and narrative reports), as well as life skills curricula if available. In addition, we reviewed reports from any evaluations of the life skills projects. Note that only five projects conducted or commissioned impact evaluations of their work (two more have evaluations planned for the future).

FIGURE 2.2. PSIPSE Projects Included in Study

GRANTEE	COUNTRY	PSIPSE FUNDING
ActionAid International	Nigeria	\$520,000
Aga Khan Foundation (India)	India	\$499,883
Aga Khan Foundation (USA)	Kenya	\$300,000
American India Foundation	India	\$603,283
African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)	Kenya	\$900,000
Century Entrepreneurship Development Agency (CEDA) International	Uganda	\$500,000
COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa (CIYOTA)	Uganda	\$275,000
CorStone*	Kenya	\$500,000
Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM)	Malawi	\$1,347,000
Educate!	Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya	\$1,100,000
Education Development Center (EDC)—Akazi Kanoze 2	Rwanda	\$5,154,266
EDC—Measuring Skills at Scale	East Africa	\$500,000
Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI)	Kenya, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire	\$7,569,641
Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE)	Uganda	\$500,000
Milele Zanzibar Foundation	Tanzania	\$300,000
Plan International	Nigeria	\$725,000
Stichting Aflatoun International	Tanzania	\$999,868
Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)	Tanzania	\$591,917

* PSIPSE funded CorStone's project in Kenya, which was informed by CorStone's implementation of the same model in India. Thus the report includes lessons learned from the India project as well.



CIYOTA | Photo by PSIPSE/Zachary Rosen



IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS We conducted in-depth interviews with 33 technical, managerial, and field staff involved in the 18 projects included in the study. Interviews were typically 90 minutes long. We asked open-ended questions of project staff to give them an opportunity to reflect on their work, think critically about what did and did not work well and why, and propose forward-looking lessons and advice.

ANALYSIS We analyzed and triangulated information from the above data sources (interviews, project documents, and external literature) to develop actionable learnings for stakeholders in the life skills development field (including practitioners, policymakers, and donors).

3 LITERATURE SCAN

We conducted a high-level scan of the relevant literature to inform our approach and help us situate the lessons emerging from PSIPSE grantees' experiences. To identify literature that helped us meet these objectives, we followed a simple two-step methodology:

FIRST We used Google Scholar—which enabled us to locate relevant literature across multiple disciplines, catalogs, and databases—to search for **systematic reviews related to the development of life skills in adolescents and young adults**. Given that PSIPSE grantees work specifically in developing countries, we excluded reviews that focused solely on studies in developed countries. However, we made some exceptions to this inclusion criterion by retaining articles that are considered influential in the life skills literature. We also retained cross-country studies, landscape assessments, definitional frameworks, and guides to life skills programming that were produced by think tanks and multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, the Brookings Institution, and UNICEF. In total, we included 26 systematic reviews and prominent landscape scans and frameworks in our literature scan. This first step allowed us to develop a cross-cutting snapshot of (1) the definitions and frameworks for life skills across various disciplines and (2) the existing evidence about how life skills development shaped a variety of outcomes. This, in turn, informed the focus areas we selected for our interviews with grantee organizations and the themes we explored in our analysis.

SECOND Following our development of the lessons learned, **we purposively identified rigorous empirical studies related to the themes uncovered by our analysis**.¹ This helped assess the extent to which PSIPSE findings were aligned with the evidence base. It also allowed us to expand and refine findings from the scan of systematic reviews we conducted in the first step.

Below we summarize cross-cutting findings from our scan of both the systematic reviews and specific empirical studies. We discuss how life skills are defined (Section A), summarize evidence on the impact of life skills programming on a variety of outcomes (Section B), and pinpoint gaps in the literature (Section C). (Note that Chapter 5 integrates literature relevant to specific findings).

A. HOW LIFE SKILLS ARE DEFINED

Life skills—also called soft skills, transferable skills, or 21st century skills—refer to a broad range of capabilities that empower individuals to be productive and successfully navigate the demands of everyday life (WHO 1999; World Bank 2013). These competencies are of interest to multiple disciplines, across which the conceptual definitions of life skills vary. We describe these diverse characterizations of life skills below.

AMONG ACTORS IN THE FIELDS OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTION SCIENCE, life skills consist of the **psychosocial skills and knowledge that position individuals to improve their health status**, particularly

¹To qualify studies as “rigorous,” we followed the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation’s (3ie) definition of rigorous impact evaluations, which describes these as “analyses that measure the net change in outcomes for a particular group of people that can be attributed to a specific program using the best methodology available, feasible and appropriate to the evaluation question that is being investigated and to the specific context” (3ie, 2008). Simply put, we included experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations that examined changes in youth outcomes that could be attributed to a specific program involving life skills.

Life skills—also called soft skills, transferable skills, or 21st century skills—refer to a broad range of capabilities that empower individuals to be productive and successfully navigate the demands of everyday life.
(WHO 1999; World Bank 2013)

with regard to sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, and guard against risky behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse (WHO 1993; UNICEF 2012). According to UNICEF, these life skills (which include communication, self-esteem, decision making, and negotiation), when combined with context-specific knowledge, can equip individuals to “interact appropriately, manage their own emotional states, and make decisions and choices for an active, safe, and productive life” (UNICEF 2012).

AMONG ECONOMISTS, life skills are conceptualized as **a transferable set of cognitive and non-cognitive skills that boost labor market outcomes** such as employment, income, productivity, job quality, and entrepreneurship (Murphy-Graham and Cohen 2018). Although there is little consensus on which skills are critical to enhancing

labor market outcomes, there are a number of life skills that are frequently cited in the labor economics literature (Lippman et al. 2015). These include cognitive skills such as problemsolving, decision making, and critical thinking (Olenik and Fawcett. 2013). To categorize and measure the non-cognitive skills needed to succeed in the work place, economists draw from the field of psychology. They often use the Big Five model of personality traits, which include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability (Kautz et al. 2014).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS have adopted a range of definitions for life skills. Some characterize them as **prerequisites for workforce success**. For example, USAID defines life or soft skills as a mix of “skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities” that are essential for human capital development and subsequent workforce success (Lippman et al. 2015). Education stakeholders, by contrast, are increasingly positioning life skills as **a critical ingredient in quality education that supports sustainable development**. For instance, at the 2015 World Education Forum in Incheon, quality education was conceptualized as that which “fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving, and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values, and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges” (APCEIU 2017).

A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY COHORT OF RESEARCHERS IS ADVANCING THE “CAPABILITY APPROACH,” which when applied to education, puts life skills at the center of a quality education (Tikly and Barrett 2011; Walker 2012; Murphy-Graham and Cohen 2018). The capability approach, which stems from Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen’s seminal work on social justice, considers people’s capabilities and not economic wealth to be of principal value. It posits that



Photo courtesy of Aga Khan Foundation (India)

people's capabilities give them the freedom to pursue their personal goals and opportunities, which in turn determines their personal well-being (Sen 1999; Sen 2009). Studies such as Tikly and Barrett (2011) extend this perspective to education, wherein quality education can enable individuals to acquire the capabilities required to enhance their well-being.

B. EVIDENCE ON LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING FOR ADOLESCENTS

The preponderance of rigorous evidence on life skills programming in developing countries has focused on linkages between life skills and workforce success, with typical outcomes of interest including wages, likelihood of employment, employment quality, employee performance, and so on. A smaller subset of the research has examined the role of youth life skills in advancing outcomes related to health, empowerment, and psychosocial well-being. (The challenges in measuring empowerment and psychosocial well-being may be a contributing factor in limiting the number of evaluations in these areas.) Below we briefly summarize this literature.

B.1. LIFE SKILLS AND LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES

In a rapidly evolving global economy, employers increasingly demand a diverse set of skills that enable employees to be highly productive and adaptable at the workplace (Olenik and Fawcett 2013). In response to this demand, there has been ample programming to grow life skills among youth about to join the workforce. Several of these programs—which integrate vocational and life skills training—have been tested rigorously and have demonstrated a positive impact on labor force outcomes. For example, an impact evaluation of BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents program in Uganda, which delivered leadership, conflict management, negotiation, and vocational training, showed that after two years **girls' likelihood of engagement in income-generating activities rose by 35 percent over baseline levels, among other positive outcomes** (Bandiera et al. 2015). In Nepal, an impact evaluation of the Employment Fund's youth training program, which offered vocational and life skills training in conjunction with employment placement services, found that the **intervention significantly improved participants' non-farm employability and monthly earnings** (Chakravarty et al. 2016).

There is some evidence to show that non-cognitive skills could rival academic or technical skills in their ability to enhance labor market outcomes (Kautz et al. 2014). In their systematic review, Kautz et al. (2014) analyze numerous skill-focused interventions to show that soft skills are comparable to or even surpass technical skills in their ability to predict employment and earnings.

B.2. LIFE SKILLS AND HEALTH OUTCOMES

Life skills development programs (including those implemented by several PSIPSE grantees) often seek to strengthen critical health outcomes for youth. **Skills such as self-efficacy, communication, and confidence can equip young people to make more autonomous health decisions—for instance, in accessing health services when needed or using contraceptive methods.** Life skills development can also support preventive outcomes. For instance, critical thinking and decision making skills can help adolescents analyze their choices more effectively and select not to use tobacco or alcohol or engage in other risky behaviors (WHO 2003; Botvin and Kantor 2000). In addition, **social skills such as communication and refusal skills enable adolescents to resist social pressure and advocate for their peers to make healthy choices** (WHO 2003; Botvin and Kantor 2000).

In addition to life skills, adolescents also need reliable, comprehensive information about health issues to make responsible choices and lead healthy lives. Provision of sexual and reproductive health information is particularly vital, given prevailing social norms in several developing countries limit adolescents' access to such information (UNICEF 2012). Several studies have evaluated life skills programs that integrate a health education component and are focused on shaping health outcomes among youth, especially outcomes related to sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention. A mixed-method evaluation of the Stepping Stones HIV prevention program in South Africa, which provided life skills trainings (to cultivate skills such as communication and risk-taking), and conducted peer group meetings, indicated a reduction in the number of sexual partners among men and fewer new HIV infections among women (Jewkes et al. 2007). Other studies have shown that life skills programs increased knowledge of sexual and reproductive health topics, increased use of health services, delayed sexual debut, and increased contraceptive use (Acharya et al. 2009; Dunbar et al. 2010; Magnani et al. 2005; Echavez et al. 2014; Jewkes et al. 2007, Leventhal et al. 2015).

B.3. LIFE SKILLS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL OUTCOMES

In many of the PSIPSE's focus countries, and across the developing world, adolescents, especially adolescent girls, are vulnerable to isolation, violence, and discrimination (Dupuy et al. 2018). In these circumstances, addressing the psychosocial needs of adolescents is particularly vital, not only because it supports mental well-being, but also because it can critically shape cognitive development and also influence physical health (Samuels et al. 2015; OECD 2018; Leventhal et al. 2015). A handful of evaluations have shown that life skills programs can help address these needs—**improving the psychosocial skills of vulnerable and/or marginalized populations** (Leventhal et al. 2015; Acharya et al. 2009; O'Callaghan et al. 2013). For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, researchers found that a community-based psychosocial intervention significantly improved the mental health and psychosocial outcomes of war-affected, sexually exploited girls. Over eight sessions, the program provided information and training to caregivers and participants on psycho-education topics (e.g. trauma and social stigma), relaxation exercises, problem-solving, parenting, and youth leadership. A randomized control trial found that the **intervention reduced stress, depression, and anxiety among program participants** (O'Callaghan et al. 2013).

B.4. LIFE SKILLS AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES

Research indicates that **life skills programs can equip young women with the skills and knowledge they need to exercise agency and make informed decisions about their lives**. A number of studies establish linkages between life skills and various girls' empowerment outcomes. For example, a recent study by Ashraf et al. (2018) posits that negotiation skills can help adolescent girls advocate for their well-being. Indeed, study results showed that adolescent girls in Zambia who participated in a role play-based negotiations training were likely to engage in intra-household bargaining to influence their parents' educational investment decisions. For instance, they offered to do more chores within the household in return for more food and/or being allowed to attend school. Overall, the training also led to an increase in school enrollment and attendance rates among participating girls, a significant finding given evidence that educational achievement markedly enhances women's agency and autonomy (Klugman et al., 2014).

Research has shown that life skills programming can be particularly effective in empowering marginalized adolescent girls who are no longer in school (for socio-economic reasons and due to familial and community pressure) (Kwauk et al. 2018). For example, Amin et al.'s 2016 randomized controlled trial of a life skills program in Bangladesh showed that training girls in gender rights, negotiation, critical thinking, and decision making contributed to a significant reduction in child marriage among 16- and 17 year-old girls.



SOWED, CorStone | Photo by PSIPSE/Zachary Rosen

Similarly, Edmeades et al.'s 2014 evaluation of the TESFA (Towards Economic and Sexual Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls) program in Ethiopia showed that providing health information and life skills training to married adolescent girls helped them improve communication with their husbands, enhanced their knowledge and use of sexual and reproductive health services, reduced gender-based violence, and boosted their mental well-being.

C. GAPS IN THE EVIDENCE BASE

A number of limitations emerged from our scan of the literature. We summarize these limitations below:

DIFFICULTY IN ISOLATING THE IMPACT OF LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: Most evaluations we reviewed as part of this literature scan measured the impacts of programs that combined life skills development with other interventions. Accordingly, the evaluations were generally unable to isolate the impacts of life skills interventions alone on target outcomes, or shed light on which specific skills provide youth with the greatest benefits (Gates et al. 2016).

LIMITED RIGOROUS RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTIONS ON CERTAIN OUTCOME DOMAINS: As seen, evidence exploring the impacts of life skills programming on psychosocial well-being is relatively sparse. More exploration is needed, furthermore, of the linkages between life skills programs and youth outcomes related to academic performance, success in the informal labor market, and violence prevention.

SHORT-TERM NATURE OF EVALUATIONS: Another limitation of the existing body of evidence is that target outcomes are measured mainly at the end of a program or soon after a program has come to a close. This prioritization of quick turnaround evaluations has limited our understanding of the long-term gains of investments in adolescent-based life skills programs in areas like health, employment, and income (Kautz et al., 2014; Ashraf et al., 2018). Indeed, the field of youth life skills development may need to harness a trend in early childhood research—to study the long-term effects of interventions in boosting earnings, improving health outcomes, and otherwise shaping adult lives (Kautz et al., 2014; Gertler et al., 2014).

LIMITED EVIDENCE AROUND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND SCALE-UP: As momentum grows around life skills, and increasingly more actors develop programming in this space, it is important to build a strong evidence base on how to optimally **implement** this programming. Additional mixed methods research is needed to understand how life skills interventions are rolled out, and drill down on specific factors facilitating and inhibiting implementation. (This research can also help shed light on the mechanisms through which life skills programs deliver positive outcomes for adolescents and young adults.) As life skills programs enter the mainstream, and begin to be expanded to larger areas, research questions around scale-up become more salient. Studies examining platforms and approaches for scaling these programs could help inform wide-ranging national or sub-national policy efforts to develop youth life skills (such as those being undertaken by several PSIPSE countries—see next chapter).

With PSIPSE grantees and other organizations becoming more active in the life skills space, the time is ripe to add to the evidence base. As organizations devise and test new interventions, they have an opportunity to address some of the key limitations in the literature, and expand our overall understanding of how to implement, sustain, scale, and maximize the effectiveness of life skills development programming.

4

OVERVIEW OF PSIPSE LIFE SKILLS PROJECTS

The 18 PSIPSE life skills projects were highly diverse—targeting the entire range of competencies characterized as life skills by the cross-disciplinary literature we scanned. These projects also adopted a range of goals and approaches, and paired life skills programming with a variety of interventions, such as vocational training, academic support, and parental sensitization. Finally, they operated in complex and evolving policy environments—across three regions and seven countries. Below we provide a crosscutting snapshot of how projects varied across these different dimensions (Figures 4.1–4.2, 4.4) and also briefly summarize each project (Figure 4.3). (Note that the projects are also at varying stages of implementation. Nine have completed implementation and nine are still ongoing.)

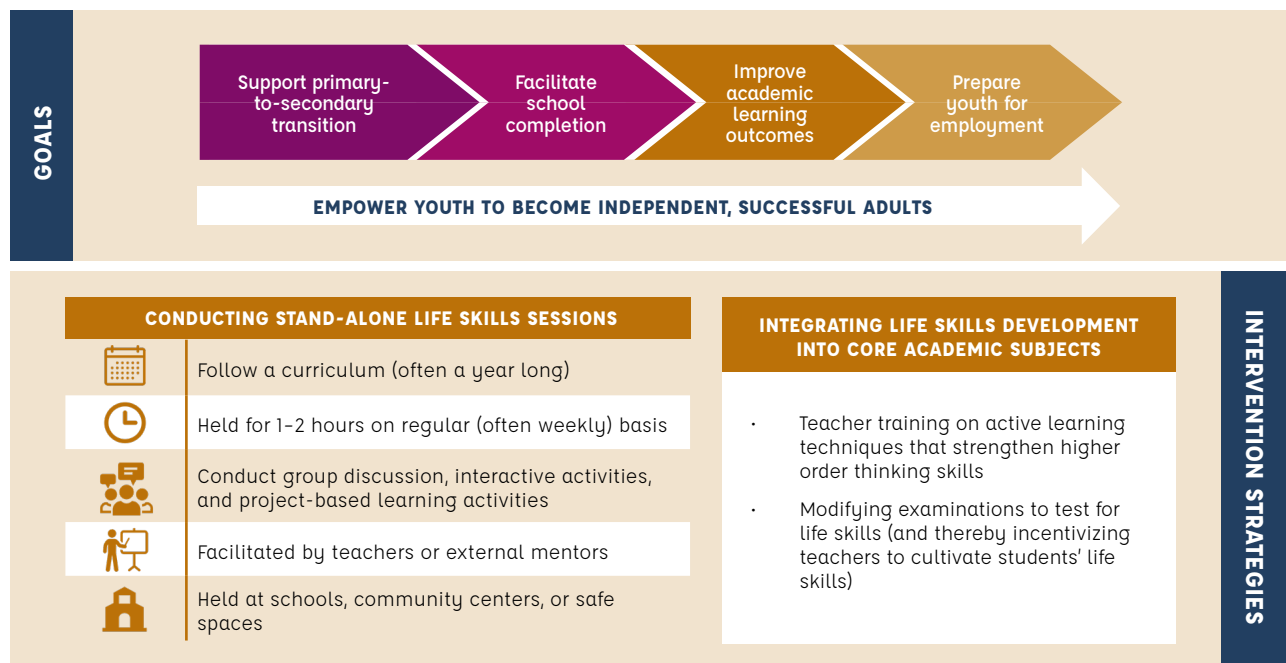
GOALS

PSIPSE LIFE SKILLS PROJECTS SOUGHT TO ADVANCE A CONTINUUM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION OUTCOMES.

For all of the projects profiled in this study, building life skills was not the end goal. Instead, it was a pathway to improving vital secondary education and life outcomes for youth (Figure 4.1). Several projects focused on **participation**; they sought to boost primary-to-secondary transition rates, prevent dropout, or foster secondary school completion. For example, American India Foundation worked with girls in grades 7–8 in a remote part of India, implementing a host of interventions (including one focused on life skills development) to facilitate their transition to secondary school. CIYOTA works with refugee students in Ugandan boarding schools, and one of its key objectives is to help these youth, who have faced a variety of challenges, to complete their schooling.

Some grantees focused on improving academic learning outcomes, viewing life skills development as a pathway to this overarching goal. For example, the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative

FIGURE 4.1. PSIPSE Life Skills Projects—Goals and Intervention Approaches



(GESCI) sought to improve students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and other life skills with the goal of ultimately improving their performance in STEM subjects. In addition, many grantees aimed to prepare youth for successful **entry into the workforce**. For example, Education Development Center (EDC) sought to endow Rwandan secondary school students with the life skills they need to obtain wage employment, become entrepreneurs, and succeed in their chosen career.

Common to all projects was a desire to instill in youth a sense of empowerment and choice. Regardless of where projects were in the secondary education continuum, they sought to position youth to make informed, independent decisions about their lives (Figure 4.1). For example, the African Population Health and Research Center (APHRC) aimed to prepare its target population— students in grades 6–8 in Nairobi's urban slums—to not only succeed academically, but also to effectively navigate life in their highly insecure communities. Its programming was intended, for instance, to give youth the life skills they need to resist engaging in risky behavior such as drug abuse. CEDA International worked with a broader age group (13–18) and aimed to prepare youth to enter the job market. However, it too had an empowerment focus like APHRC. It aimed to position its target population, girls in conflict-affected areas of Uganda, to identify and go after their aspirations and become leaders for change in their communities.

INTERVENTION APPROACHES

PROJECTS SOUGHT TO STRENGTHEN LIFE SKILLS BY CONDUCTING STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS AND/OR MODIFYING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION. The majority of PSIPSE life skills projects (14 in total) designed and implemented stand-alone life skills sessions. These took place, for the most part, "outside" of the educational system, with sessions held after school or during the weekend. However, in some projects, particularly those in the scale-up phase, sessions were integrated into the curriculum/class schedule. For example, in CorStone's project, participating schools in India and Kenya reserved one period each week for the administration of CorStone's resilience curriculum. EDC's life skills sessions were adopted by the Rwandan government as part of the country's entrepreneurship subject, and the curriculum for the sessions was scaled to all Rwandan secondary schools.

Life skills sessions typically integrated a variety of interactive activities, including group discussion, reflection on real-life scenarios, role play, and more. They frequently followed a set curriculum, often one year long, in which each module typically focused on one skill or set of skills. Sessions were held regularly, usually once a week, and lasted one or two hours. They were held at schools, community centers, or other easily accessible locations. Facilitators for these sessions were often teachers, contracted and trained by the grantee organizations to implement the sessions in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Some projects provided relationship-based life skills programming, giving youth the opportunity to connect with supportive adults. These projects hired external facilitators or mentors, often from the local community who were relatively close in age to the target population (Figure 4.1).

A subset of the grantees (seven in total) made the case that life skills could be strengthened through core academic subjects (English, mathematics, the sciences, etc.). They typically sought to train the teachers of these subjects to implement active learning techniques in the classroom, with the goal of cultivating key interpersonal and higher order thinking skills among students. Examples are GESCI, which trained teachers in ICT-infused teaching and project-based learning, and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), which trained teachers in a variety of learner-centered pedagogical approaches. By having teachers effectively implement such techniques in the classroom, these grantees sought to build skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

In addition to training teachers in active learning methods, one grantee sought to actively incentivize teachers to use these techniques in the classroom and strengthen students' life skills. The Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) is working with the Ugandan government to modify public examinations so that individual questions require students to exercise key higher order thinking skills. LGIHE is hopeful that this shift in the focus of the examinations will motivate teachers to strengthen students' higher order thinking skills in the classroom, potentially by implementing learner-centered methods (Figure 4.1).

TARGET LIFE SKILLS

Skills like communication, problem-solving, and confidence were a common focus across PSIPSE projects, whereas negotiation, self-management, and self-awareness were targeted by few projects.

THE LIFE SKILLS THAT PSIPSE PROJECTS SEEK TO STRENGTHEN INCLUDE COGNITIVE SKILLS, PERSONAL STRENGTHS, AND INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES.

As discussed in Chapter 3, frameworks from a variety of disciplines seek to define and categorize life skills. Of these, we relied on the UNICEF general framework for life skills education to categorize the skills on which PSIPSE projects focus. The UNICEF framework adopts a cross-cutting empowerment focus and a comprehensive approach—consolidating the life skills identified as important by UN agencies and other organizations. It does not limit its conceptualization to life skills needed to achieve specific goals; for example, workforce success. This is well suited to the PSIPSE portfolio of life skills projects, which have a range of goals and focus areas. The UNICEF framework offers three broad categories

of skills, including (1) cognitive skills, which are higher order thinking skills needed for analysis and decision making, (2) personal strengths, which are needed for awareness, drive, and self-management, and (3) interpersonal skills, which are skills for interacting effectively with others (UNICEF 2012).

Figure 4.2 lists the life skills targeted by PSIPSE projects, organized by the UNICEF framework's three categories. Note that most projects focused on at least two of these categories. For example, ActionAid sought to build personal strengths, such as self-worth and confidence, as well as interpersonal skills, such as communication and negotiation, among its target population (female students in northern Nigeria). Some life skills were targeted more frequently than others. Skills like communication, problem-solving, and confidence were a common focus across PSIPSE projects, whereas negotiation, self-management, and self-awareness were targeted by few projects.

FIGURE 4.2. Life skills PSIPSE projects seek to cultivate

COGNITIVE SKILLS	PERSONAL STRENGTHS	INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Problem solving • Decision making • Planning • Learning to learn • Creativity • Imagination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-realization • Self-awareness • Self-esteem • Self-management • Confidence • Taking initiative • Expressing feelings • Managing strong emotions • Dependability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Negotiation • Conflict resolution • Teamwork • Social awareness • Listening skills • Debate

Figure 4.3. Overview of PSIPSE life skills projects

GRANTEE	TARGET POPULATION	PROJECT SUMMARY
❖ = Stand-alone life skills sessions; ◆ = Efforts to strengthen life skills by modifying teacher's pedagogy or educational content		
ActionAid International [❖]	12–17 year old girls in Northern Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established girls' spaces in schools, where teachers and educated women from the area conducted hour long weekly sessions that provided academic, livelihoods, and life skills support. ActionAid also trained school-based management committees (which supported girls' spaces and developed strategies to improve educational quality), and trained female professionals to mentor girls.
Aga Khan Foundation (India) [❖]	Out-of-school girls in urban slums in India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained girls on life skills, covering topics related to health, nutrition, and menstrual hygiene; seeks to strengthen girls' communication skills and their ability to strengthen negotiation and dialogue skills, and improve voice and agency of adolescent girls; and builds girls' knowledge of their legal rights. Aga Khan Foundation also provides remedial education courses, scholastic training in specific subjects, and vocational training.
Aga Khan Foundation (USA) [❖◆]	Female students ages 14–16 in Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed science clubs, led by students and supported by teachers, where students identified community problems, conducted research on them, and developed and implemented science-based solutions. Clubs met once a week. Trained teachers on activity-based science instruction; teachers were trained to use the 7E approach (elicit, engage, explain, explore, elaborate, evaluate, extend).
American India Foundation [❖]	Students in grades 6–8 in a remote part of rural India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed girls' and boys' groups that met monthly for 1.5 hours, either before school or over the weekend; sessions were interactive and focused on encouraging students to express their opinions, identify aspirations, gain confidence, and start thinking about and planning for their future. American India Foundation also conducted learning enrichment activities; facilitated community learning audits; built the capacity of school management and development committees; held secondary school enrollment drives; and organized school competitions, science fairs, and other such opportunities for students.
APHRC [❖]	Students in grades 6–8 in a remote part of rural India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnered with two CBOs to organize mentor-led life skills sessions covering topics like self-awareness and self-esteem, decision-making, sexual and reproductive health knowledge; and leadership sessions coupled with motivational talks. APHRC also organizes after school support sessions focused on improving numeracy and literacy, takes students on workplace visits to increase career awareness, and conducts counseling sessions to sensitize parents on how to be more effectively involved in their children's lives and education.
CEDA International [❖]	13–18 year old girls in conflict-affected areas of Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized weekly 2-hour life/social and leadership skills sessions over one year (originally conducted by local community members, ultimately conducted by teachers). These followed a "5-D" cycle with the following phases: discover, dream, design, develop, and destiny. CEDA also conducts entrepreneurship and vocational training and holds community dialogues.
CIYOTA [❖]	Refugees in upper primary & secondary schools in Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct leadership sessions that facilitate group discussion around pre-set topics (for example, "servant leadership") and bring in motivational speakers; CIYOTA staff conduct the sessions on a monthly basis during the school year and a weekly basis during the holidays. CIYOTA also provides remedial support and psychosocial support, conducts entrepreneurship workshops, and holds entrepreneurship competitions, where winning projects are given seed funding.
CorStone [❖]	Middle school students in rural India and Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct weekly one-hour resilience sessions over one year (these are facilitated by teachers); half the sessions build internal psychosocial resilience skills, and the other half equip students to apply those skills. Sessions start with an opening circle to bring everyone together, move on to an activity or story that introduces a new concept, facilitate open sharing or another activity to help students apply that concept to their own lives, and end with a closing circle.
CRECCOM [❖]	Junior secondary and senior primary students in Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly life skills sessions facilitated by student leaders, with support from teachers, on leadership and entrepreneurship (and topics such as reproductive health) CRECCOM also provides extra academic support to students, trains teachers on English language literacy and gender-sensitive pedagogy, mobilizes communities, and engages in a variety of activities to improve school governance
Educate! [❖◆]	Secondary school students in Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate Experience! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly one-hour skills sessions that are conducted by youth mentors and rolled out over one year in three phases, involving (1) self-reflection and identification of aspirations, (2) building skills through interactive activities, and (3) applying skills through hands-on projects Formation of business clubs, where students can take forward the ideas they came up with during the skills course or come up with and execute new business ideas. Mentors help form and advise the business clubs. Peer mentorship, which entails Educate! Scholars conducting one-off annual activities to train other students in the skills they acquired. Experience Association: Teacher training on a learner-centered pedagogical approach known as "skill lab," which has three steps: (1) Build—teachers interactively share knowledge and building skills; (2) Practice—students practice skills in groups; and (3) Present—students present what they discussed.
EDC – Akazi Kanoze 2 [❖]	Upper secondary school and level 3 TVET students in Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work Ready Now! (WRN) curriculum, which is designed to build life and hard skills through role plays and other interactive activities. WRN is being implemented as part of the entrepreneurship subject in Rwandan secondary schools, and is currently being scaled across Rwanda. School-to-work transition (or work-based learning) support, which entails workplace observations, shadowing, hands-on job training, or internships; students use their parents'/communities' networks to find placements, with support from their teachers.
EDC – Measuring Skills at Scale [◆]	Youth in East Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a tool for teachers in Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya to quickly assess four youth life skills (communication, interpersonal skills, dependability, problem solving/critical thinking); the idea is for teachers to use the tool to understand student needs and change teaching practices as needed.
GESCI [◆]	Secondary school students in Kenya, Tanzania, and Côte d'Ivoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher training on using ICT to enrich teaching; the training supports three phases of ICT integration (each phase is one year): technology literacy, knowledge deepening, and knowledge creation. Teachers focus on developing specific life skills among students in each phase. To support ICT-infused teaching, GESCI is also building a strong enabling environment in schools. In its second phase, African Digital Schools of Distinction, it has identified four stages of ICT integration and is motivating schools to progress through them.
LGIHE [◆]	Secondary school students in Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEBC) to assess the extent to which the current Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) examinations assess higher order thinking skills and gain insight into how test questions could be modified to assess those skills more effectively. By modifying the examinations, LGIHE hopes to motivate teachers to grow their students' higher order thinking skills. LGIHE also builds teachers' capacity to implement active learning methods, which can help students acquire higher order thinking skills.
Milele Zanzibar Foundation [❖◆]	Secondary & upper primary students in Zanzibar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MZF seeks to strengthen the STEM-related work force in Zanzibar by (1) providing teacher capacity-building to strengthen STEM instruction in schools, (2) strengthening students' performance in STEM subjects through week-long STEM camps and quarterly STEM competitions, and (3) preparing students for careers in STEM through career readiness training, visits from industry representatives, and large career fairs.
Plan International [❖]	Youth ages 14–16 in Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A combined life skills (Choose a Future!) and work readiness (Ready for Work) curriculum is implemented by local facilitators in 2 hour sessions that are held 2–3 times a week.
Stichting Aflatoun International [❖]	Teenage mothers in Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with Karibu Tanzania Organization to introduce a two-year integrated secondary education, vocational training, soft skills, and entrepreneurship curriculum for teenage mothers attending Tanzania's Folk Development Colleges (FDCs – government institutions that provide vocational training to adults, and coursework on general subjects such as civics, leadership, business, etc.); the course is taught by current FDC teachers and entails 1–2 hour classes each week.
VSO [❖]	Students in Forms 1–4 in Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career awareness sessions for students in career clubs to build self-awareness among students (knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, identifying one's passions), introduce them to a variety of career options, help them identify a career pathway of choice, and give them information on what qualifications are needed to follow that pathway; VSO also sets up competitions among students to conduct industry visits and trains teachers in learner-centered methods.



INTERACTION WITH OTHER INTERVENTIONS

PSIPSE PROJECTS OFTEN PAIR THEIR LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTIONS WITH OTHER STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO ADVANCE THEIR OVERARCHING GOALS. Some projects that prepare students to enter and succeed in the work force paired their life skills programming with training in **vocational or hard skills**. For example, Stichting Aflatoun International (Aflatoun) works to position teenage mothers in Tanzania, who are not permitted to attend public schools by law, to complete secondary education and become self-sufficient adults. To that end, it has developed a program for Tanzania's Folk Development Colleges, which these young women are allowed to attend, that integrates academic, vocational training, life skills, and entrepreneurship support.

Some projects combined career awareness and life skills programming. For example, VSO conducted career awareness sessions for Tanzanian secondary school students in career clubs. The sessions began by building self-awareness, and then helped students select careers and learn about educational and other requirements to embark on those careers. VSO also organized industry site visits.

A few PSIPSE grantees also linked **parental sensitization** activities to their life skills work. For example, APHRC seeks to motivate parents to get more involved in their children's schooling (which can help strengthen students' drive and initiative) and improve parent-to-child communication (which can bolster emerging interpersonal skills among youth).

Finally, several PSIPSE projects entailed both life skills programming and interventions to improve **academic learning** (such as teacher training and after-school coaching). These strategies were closely integrated when grantees sought to strengthen life skills by modifying core subject instruction (see the bullet just above on intervention approaches). In other cases, they were less integrated. For example, ActionAid provided academic, livelihood, and life skills support to female students in northern Nigeria with the intention of addressing the priority needs of this population.










GEOGRAPHY

PSIPSE PROJECTS OPERATE IN POLICY ENVIRONMENTS THAT HAVE EXHIBITED VARYING DEGREES AND TYPES OF FOCUS ON LIFE SKILLS. These policy environments differ in three key ways (Figure 4.4). First, they have made **varying levels of progress** in developing and implementing policies to cultivate youth life skills. For example, the Rwandan Ministry of Education has adopted an integrated hard- and soft skills-focused work readiness curriculum for its entrepreneurship subject (the curriculum was developed by PSIPSE grantee EDC). In contrast, Nigeria has a high-level policy commitment to strengthening youth life skills, but recent curricular efforts have been focused mainly on strengthening hard skills.

Second, PSIPSE focus countries have **varying approaches** to developing life skills. Some favor a standalone Life Skills Education course; others integrate life skills development into the existing academic curriculum; and a few adopt both strategies. Malawi, for example, has had a stand-alone Life Skills Education (LSE) course for primary school students since 2004 and for secondary school students since 2010. Kenya introduced an LSE course in 2008, but its rollout was uneven and ultimately not sustained (see Figure 4.4 for more detail). Today, following a 2016 educational reform effort, it is focusing on integrating life skills development into the curriculum for core subjects. Finally, Uganda had adopted both approaches. It has embedded life skills development into its 2018 Sexuality Education Framework (currently on hold to incorporate suggestions from religious authorities, which have some concerns around the sexuality education framing). In addition, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports has introduced a variety of new learner-centered pedagogical methods to facilitate life skills development through the core academic curriculum.

Figure 4.4. Life skills policy environment in PSIPSE focus countries

 <p>INDIA</p>	<p>Two recent efforts to embed life skills development in secondary school curricula:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Human Resource Development launched the Adolescent Education Programme (AEP) in 2005. Rolled out in certain groups of government secondary schools and in specific states, it focused on helping young people (1) become comfortable with changes during adolescence, (2) maintain healthy relationships, (3) understand gender-based stereotypes, (4) recognize and report sexual abuse, (5) learn about HIV/AIDS prevention, and (6) avoid drug abuse (NCERT 2018). Currently, the Ministry of Health is in the process of developing an integrated health and life skills curriculum as part of Ayushman Bharat, the national health protection scheme. The curriculum builds on AEP and has received input from a variety of civil society and multilateral organizations. It includes topics relating to emotional well-being, interpersonal skills, gender, mental health, safety and security, as well as the physical health themes from AEP. The 12 modules are currently being refined and translated, with teacher training and curricular rollout to follow for grades 6 to 12 in priority districts identified by the government.
 <p>KENYA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kenyan Institute of Education, now known as the Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development, launched Life Skills Education (LSE) in Kenya in 2008. It focused on three key areas: knowing and living with oneself, knowing and living with others, and making effective decisions. It has a strong values focus, and seeks to promote cooperation, simplicity, tolerance, respect, peace, freedom, unity, love, honesty, responsibility, humility, happiness, and integrity. The plan was to implement Life Skills Education for one period each week in all primary and secondary schools (UNICEF 2012). However, in practice, the rollout of the curriculum was uneven and ultimately not sustained, with in-country experts noting the following key barriers: (1) inadequate teacher capacity-building to implement the curriculum, which required different pedagogical techniques, and (2) the non-examinable nature of the subject, which led to it being deprioritized by schools. As part of the 2016 curricular reform effort, Kenya integrated life skills development into the academic curriculum. The current curricular framework seeks to develop seven competencies: communication and collaboration, self-efficacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, and learning to learn. LSE will still be a stand-alone subject in lower secondary schools. However, it will be integrated into the Community Service Learning subject in senior secondary schools (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD] 2017). Educate is partnering with the KICD to improve the teacher training framework as part of the rollout of Community Service Learning.
 <p>MALAWI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life skills education in Malawi was originally embedded in HIV/AIDS education in the mid-1990s (following the height of the pandemic). It was a stand-alone subject at the primary level by 2004, and at the secondary level by 2010. In this year, the subject also became examinable, and required for primary and junior secondary students (and optional for senior secondary students) (UNICEF 2012). Through the subject, the government aims to strengthen self-management and self-esteem among youth, prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, help youth negotiate everyday challenges in their lives, and ready them for the world of work. The curriculum has suffered several implementation challenges, including prioritization of subjects like mathematics and languages, limited teacher training, overly technical language, and lack of community support (Chirwa and Naidoo 2014).
 <p>RWANDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been substantial progress on operationalizing life skills development at scale in Rwanda. Since around 2009, the Workforce Development Authority under the Ministry of Education has been interested in life skills development. It partnered with PSIPSE grantee EDC to pilot Work Ready Now! (EDC's integrated soft- and hardskills focused work readiness curriculum) in a set of technical and vocational education institutions. The success of the pilot increased buy-in from the government, and in 2014, as part of a curricular reform effort, Work Ready Now! was integrated into the entrepreneurship subject in secondary schools. It is currently being scaled across the country, with technical support from EDC, Educate!, and other NGOs.
 <p>NIGERIA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nigeria's education authorities have a high-level policy commitment to life skills development, with the current curricular framework noting, for example, that "every learner who has gone through the nine years of basic education should have acquired appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative, and life skills; as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for a lifelong learning; as a basis for scientific and reflective thinking." (Igbokwe 2015). However, this policy commitment has not translated into changes on the ground to cultivate life skills. For example, the vision among Nigerian policymakers was that the 35 trade subjects rolled out as part of the 2009 curricular reform effort (such as bookkeeping, cosmetology, tourism, etc.) would also cultivate life skills. However, it is unclear that this goal was operationalized at the classroom level. There is more activity around life skills programming from other agencies, such as the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Office of the Vice President, in the tertiary space. One prominent federal program is N-Power, a large-scale skills development program, which deploys youth volunteers and trainees in a variety of sectors, such as agriculture, health, education, information technology, and the "creative industry" (for example, animation and graphic design). Participating youth are offered the needed vocational and life skills training, on-the-job training, a small stipend, and linkages to job and internship opportunities.
 <p>TANZANIA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life skills originally gained traction in Tanzania in the mid-1990s, when it was introduced as an examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. The subject had a strong values focus—it covered issues such as citizenship, good behavior, and respect for others. It also sought to cultivate skills such critical thinking. In 2005, as part of a large-scale reform initiative, the government streamlined the curriculum by cutting several examinable subjects, including life skills education (Paulo and Tilya 2014). Our conversations with in-country experts indicate that this led to the subject dropping in priority among teachers, who often used the period allocated to life skills to focus on examinable subjects. This situation continues today, though there has been recent interest among government stakeholders in revitalizing life skills education. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology is in the process of developing a new life skills policy (which is yet to be shared externally).
 <p>UGANDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has embedded life skills development into its 2018 Sexuality Education Framework. It has identified 20 target life skills, including conflict resolution, decision making, communication, negotiation, leadership, goal-setting, assertiveness, refusal skills, coping with emotions and stress, self-awareness, self-control, self-esteem, help- and health-seeking behaviors, time management, employability skills, analyzing the media, and journaling (Ministry of Education and Sports 2018). The sexuality education focus of the framework has received considerable pushback from religious bodies, which operate about three-quarters of the schools in Uganda. These authorities are currently revising the framework to adopt a broader focus than sexuality education. In 2015-2016, the MoES' National Curriculum Development Center introduced a variety of new learner-centered pedagogical methods to facilitate life skills development through the core academic curriculum. However, though guidelines and manuals were developed, teachers were not trained on these techniques (for budget reasons). Country experts are hoping teachers will receive this training when the new curriculum is rolled out in 2020.

Finally, country governments vary in the extent to which they focus life skills programming on **values and content** (e.g. health topics) versus skills. Some have a strong health focus. For example, India's Ministry of Health is in the process of introducing an integrated health and life skills curriculum under its national health protection scheme. Malawi's Life Skills Education course has a strong focus on HIV/AIDS prevention. Other countries adopt life skills curricula that prioritize values education. For example, Tanzania's course covered issues such as citizenship, good behavior, and respect for others. (Note that the course has not been prioritized by schools since it became non-examinable in 2005.)

5 KEY LESSONS LEARNED

In this chapter, we discuss the lessons that emerged from our analysis—on the design of life skills curricula and programming (Section A), on-the-ground delivery of this programming (Section B), measurement of life skills and evaluation of life skills interventions (Section C), and strategies for sustaining and scaling promising interventions (Section D). The lessons were shared directly by grantee representatives or inferred from their experiences and evaluation results. Whenever possible, especially in the first section on design, we bring in the literature to further illuminate the findings.

A. DESIGN OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

In this section, we share lessons on the selection of target life skills (A.1), strategies for cultivating life skills (A.2), the ideal target populations for life skills programming (A.3), mainstreaming gender into life skills programming (A.4), and pairing life skills efforts with other interventions (A.5).

A.1. WHICH SKILLS AND STRENGTHS TO CULTIVATE

PROGRAM DESIGN IDEALLY BEGINS WITH THE IDENTIFICATION OF TARGET LIFE SKILLS—THROUGH THEORY OF CHANGE DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENTS. Some PSIPSE grantees carefully selected target life skills and developed interventions geared to cultivate those competencies among youth. However, several grantees did not have a clear vision of the skills they sought to develop. This lack of specificity compromised program logic and effectiveness, with life skills development not closely integrated with other program components, and not clearly linked to overarching program goals.

PSIPSE grantee experiences shed light on how to hone in on target skills, through the following design steps:

Theory of change development involves “backwards mapping” from long-term goals (for example, transition to employment) to intermediate outcomes (specific life skills, such as communication) to activities (for example, extracurricular sessions that include debate and public speaking). For example, CorStone identified external structural barriers that students in rural India face—such as the lack of a supportive family, strong adult role model, or safe school environment—and worked backwards to identify the internal assets needed to navigate those conditions.

Needs assessments can be used to learn which skills can help shift long-term outcomes and to align skills with the specific needs of the target population. For example, LGIHE was interested in identifying life skills that positioned students for successful employment. So it conducted employer interviews to understand job

“We believe that you always have the ability to change your internal assets. You always are able to build and shape those. And this may even allow you to eventually change your external situation. It’s really starting from the inside out.”

CORSTONE

market needs, ultimately selecting the 11 skills most highly ranked by employers. EDC, which is developing a tool for teachers in East Africa to quickly assess youth life skills, brought together a group of in-house youth workforce development experts to engage in the Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) process. The experts pinpointed the tasks that youth typically conduct in an entry-level job in East or West Africa and worked backward to identify the knowledge and skills needed to complete those tasks—to be assessed by the tool (See Figure 5.1 for details on the process EDC followed to identify target skills.)²

Typically, the literature is another resource for program designers—who can learn from both academic and gray literature about what has and has not worked in the past and devise interventions that build on this knowledge and test new approaches. This is true of life skills development as well to some extent. As seen in Chapter 3, the existing literature does provide insight on the effectiveness of programs that combine life skills development with other intervention approaches. However, with a few exceptions, most of the rigorous studies to date do not shed light on which specific life skills are needed to advance target outcomes. Practitioners and policymakers may not as yet be able to draw on the literature to identify the life skills they need to develop in order to achieve their ultimate goals.

FOR PARTICULARLY MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS, LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT MAY NEED TO BEGIN WITH EFFORTS TO FOSTER SELF-REALIZATION AND SELF-WORTH. Conversations with PSIPSE grantees revealed that life skills may need to be cultivated sequentially for disadvantaged groups of youth. This population may need to first develop personal strengths such as self-worth and

Figure 5.1. EDC's approach to identifying life skills needed for transitioning into the workforce

EDC is developing a tool for teachers and NGO-based trainers that assesses life skills acquisition among students, particularly skills that prepare youth for the workforce. EDC engaged in a two-step process to identify the skills to measure:

STEP 1. Developing a Curriculum (DACUM) workshop, which asked a group of youth workforce development experts to “define:

- The entry-level worker who might graduate from a work readiness program
- The types of entry-level jobs such graduates may find
- The duties of such entry-level jobs
- The tasks necessary to fulfill the duties of such entry-level jobs
- The knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) a youth must possess to complete the tasks” (NOCTI 2017)

STEP 2. EDC then administered a verification survey to the experts to help narrow the list of KSAs. Respondents were asked to answer the following questions for 18 KSAs:

- “How important is this skill to success in an entry-level job?
- How often do you think an entry-level worker would need to use this skill?
- How easy or difficult is it to learn this skill?
- Would an entry-level employee be expected to have this skill upon starting a job?” (NOCTI 2017)

These steps helped identify four skills:

Standard	Example competencies (not exhaustive)
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively communicate orally • Provide clear and concise instructions • Participate in group or team discussions
Interpersonal skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work cooperatively in a workplace team • Provide good customer service • Identify steps of resolving conflict
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take personal responsibility for one’s work • Follow directions • Exhibit flexibility and adaptability
Problem-solving/ critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions by considering all facts

Source: EDC (2018).

² Literature reviews are another commonly used tool to identify what intermediate outcomes (in this case, skills) are needed to drive long-term goals. However, as seen in Chapter 3, the literature in the life skills space is relatively narrow, so a more immediate priority for organizations focused on life skills is to help expand the evidence base. Once the evidence base is larger and more diverse, it can be used by organizations to understand what has and has not worked in the past and develop interventions that are (1) informed by this learning and (2) attempting approaches that are truly innovative.

selfconfidence before growing cognitive skills (such as critical thinking) and interpersonal skills (such as negotiation) that will position them for academic and employment success. This was a common finding among PSIPSE grantees that worked with marginalized youth:

CEDA International worked with young women in post-conflict areas of northern and western Uganda, many of whom have lived through considerable hardship and trauma. CEDA noted that these young women viewed themselves primarily as victims and burdens, an outlook it felt was critical to dismantle in order to access and unlock their hidden potential. Accordingly, the "5-D Cycle" rolled out by CEDA's life skills sessions started with the Discover Phase, which asked: who are you, what are your hobbies, what are your strengths, what are your weaknesses, what are your values, and what do you want in life? Only after helping girls discover themselves through this phase, was CEDA able to transition to (1) helping them hone in on their aspirations and (2) giving them the tools to achieve those aspirations.

Aflatoun and KTO work with teenage mothers who are no longer attending secondary school. (Tanzanian law prohibits young women who become pregnant while in school from continuing to attend). They noted that it is vital to build students' self-esteem prior to turning to life skills because these young women are often weighed down by guilt and low confidence, both emanating from how they have been treated by family and by society after they became pregnant. The discrimination they have faced, and the impact this has on their self-worth and other such personal strengths, can hold them back in both academic and employment settings.

CorStone, which works with students in remote parts of rural India and Kenya, is focused on building resilience and psychosocial well-being. CorStone conducted a randomized controlled trial in India to test the effectiveness of its Girls First resilience curriculum. The researchers found that the curriculum not only strengthened psychosocial assets (including emotional resilience, self-efficacy, and socioemotional assets) and enhanced psychosocial well-being (depression, anxiety, and social well-being), but also improved key health outcomes (hand washing, menstrual hygiene, ability to access a doctor, and communication with adults about health issues) (Leventhal et al. 2015; Leventhal et al. 2016).

Other non-PSIPSE life skills programs that target vulnerable adolescents in developing countries have also sought to strengthen beneficiaries' personal strengths, such as self-realization, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Hadjipateras et al. 2006; Erulkar et al. 2011; Cadena et al. 2015). For instance, Ethiopia's Bright Future program and Nepal's Room to Read Girl's Education Program aimed to help vulnerable adolescent girls develop the life skills they needed to navigate their day-to-day challenges. The Bright Future

"We have found that our first program phase [the Discover Phase] is our most powerful phase that also takes the most time. It enables girls to say, wow, I need to reawaken this giant within me."

CEDA INTERNATIONAL

"From the beginning, we have a lot of work to do on self-esteem and self-confidence ...otherwise it's impossible for [these teenage mothers] to work because their learning is damaged by how they've been treated, both in the society and in their families."

KTO

STRENGTHENING YOUNG PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOCIAL ISSUES THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES CAN HELP INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT. Several PSIPSE life skills development efforts sought to not only build skills, but to increase awareness of specific nonacademic subjects that “touch adolescents' lives,” including sexual and reproductive health, drug use, and civic participation. This acted as a foundation for skills development. One example is APHRC, which works with school-going youth in urban slums in Kenya, has its life skills sessions start with straightforward information provision, which ultimately transitions into skill building. For instance, the module on drug abuse first shares information about what it means to abuse drugs and common drugs in the community, then it transitions slowly into a group discussion with participants about how they can avoid being drawn into using and abusing drugs. This conversation allows participants to apply their emerging life skills—in this case, decision making, decisiveness, self-management, stress management, and so on—to a situation they are likely to encounter in their community. By giving young people information about the societal issues they regularly face, they are better equipped to exercise their emerging life skills.

The evidence base supports this finding, with a number of studies demonstrating the role of context-specific knowledge in enhancing life skills and social and health outcomes among adolescents (Bandiera et al. 2014; Kashfi et al. 2012; Dunbar et al. 2010). For example, the Center for Development and Population Activities offered the Better Life Options Program in India, which trained adolescent girls in a variety of health topics, including sexual and reproductive health issues, and simultaneously sought to improve their agency, self-efficacy, and self-worth. A quasi-experimental study found that this program was able to successfully improve gender attitudes, decision making, and self-efficacy, among other positive outcomes (Acharya et al. 2009). Other life skills programs that actively sought to improve knowledge of topics such as HIV, reproductive health, and gender have also led to successful outcomes, such as improved social and household-level relationships (indicative of enhanced interpersonal skills) and increased use of health and family planning services (Dunbar et al. 2010; Dunbar et al. 2014; Hadjipateras et al. 2006).

A.2. HOW TO STRENGTHEN SELECTED LIFE SKILLS

LIFE SKILLS CAN BE DEVELOPED BY MODIFYING TEACHERS' PEDAGOGY OR BY PROVIDING STAND-ALONE, MENTORED LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS, BUT IDEALLY BOTH APPROACHES WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED JOINTLY. The majority of PSIPSE grantees implemented stand-alone life skills sessions (either as their core program or together with other interventions in a multipart program). These organizations noted that it is critical for youth to receive the specialized support that stand-alone sessions offer, as well as guidance from a mentor who can motivate them to overcome the obstacles they encounter. The evidence base supports this finding. Indeed, studies show that stand-alone life skills initiatives involving individual or group mentorships are a highly effective vehicle for developing critical youth life skills, including self-esteem, and social and relationship skills (Dupuy et al. 2018; Bandiera et al. 2012; Kashfi et al. 2012, DuBois et al. 2002, DuBois et al. 2011). Mentors, who may belong to the same

“Since students interact with teachers for 8, 10, 12 hours a day in Uganda, I feel that we are wasting an opportunity if we do not deepen teachers' way of teaching, such that the holistic growth of the students is not relegated to extracurricular activities or the time outside the classroom, but it's actually boosted from within the classroom activity.”

LUIGI GIUSSANI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

community as the program participants, are able to develop a strong rapport with participants. They have typically had experiences similar to what the program participants are undergoing, and have strengthened their own life skills as a result. This renders them uniquely equipped to help develop these life skills among program participants (Dupuy et al. 2018). Additionally, for marginalized and vulnerable youth, mentors can play a critical role in providing a stable, caring relationship and psychosocial support in the absence of parents or strong care-giving structures (Brown et al. 2005).

A few grantee organizations (for example, LGIHE and GESCI) sought to strengthen life skills primarily by transforming pedagogy—that is, by training core subject teachers on active learning techniques that are engaging and participatory. They posit that introducing these techniques in the classroom can improve key higher order thinking skills (such as problem-solving) and interpersonal skills (such as communication). This strategy also has the merit of being highly scalable because it operates squarely within the educational system. For instance, teacher trainings on learner-centered methods can be cascaded through multiple administrative levels until they reach the classroom.

"I think relationships are really hard for educationalists to value because there's so much focus on speed and efficiency in the system. You have a responsibility for equity. You have a responsibility to get as many students through as possible, as quickly as possible and as cheaply as possible. And none of that is a good environment for relationship building, which is so core to life skills. So, the mentorship aspect is key. This is why we still have a mentor in our program and it's not 100 percent the teacher. That is a person who has the time, space, and relationship—the bank account, so to speak—to be able to relate to students."

EDUCATE!

Some grantees (for example, Educate! and Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa) adopted both approaches. Educate! has mentors implement a skills course for students, trains teachers on a simple learner-centered pedagogical approach, and offers students the opportunity to develop and implement income generation ideas through business clubs. Aga Khan Academy trains teachers on activity-based science instruction and forms clubs for students to generate and execute science-based solutions to community problems. Grantees feel that both approaches are needed at once. Modifying teachers' pedagogy to promote implementation of active learning methods can ensure that life skills are being continuously strengthened—through everyday classroom instruction. At the same time, however, youth also need stand-alone, intensive supports to build their life skills and strong relationships with a mentor who acts as their role model and sounding board. Implementing these two strategies in parallel has been shown to yield strong impacts. An independent, quasi-experimental evaluation of Educate!'s Uganda program found that the program had statistically significant impacts on students' public speaking, leadership, and grit scores (the treatment group scored 1.23, 1.43, and 0.34 points more on these scores, respectively, than the control group) (Salam et al. 2016).

CURRICULA AND GUIDELINES FOR STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS CAN BE LOOSELY DRAWN IF ROLLED OUT TO A FINITE NUMBER OF SITES, BUT MAY NEED TO BE PRESCRIPTIVE IF IMPLEMENTED AT SCALE. The practitioners interviewed for this study felt that, ideally, life skills curricula would be in the hands of intensively trained, highly skilled facilitators who are able to tailor the curriculum to address the specific needs of each cohort of students. This is achievable on a small scale. For example, Aflatoun and KTO are working with select teachers at only 20 Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania, and even at scale would only be working with 55 Folk Development Colleges. They are able to train their facilitators (teachers in the Folk Development Colleges) to learn about the unique experiences of the target population (teenage mothers), assess their needs and skills, and select the most salient elements of the curriculum for implementation.

When the scale is much larger, this built-in flexibility may be difficult to offer. A key example is CorStone, which is working with hundreds of schools at once and partnering with the government of Bihar, India, to scale its resilience program across the state. Given the number of teachers it reaches and their limited bandwidth, the training CorStone offers is necessarily short—about 10 days over the course of a year. This does not offer enough time to help teachers (1) internalize the concepts surrounding resilience that are the focus of the program and (2) become fully comfortable with facilitation. Therefore, CorStone has intentionally made its curriculum very prescriptive. It offers a play-by-play of how teachers are supposed to conduct each session, with specifications on how to set up, roll out, and complete participatory activities. This also increases the likelihood of the program being implemented with fidelity and of target outcomes improving at scale.

A.3. WHOM TO TARGET WITH LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS IDEALLY TARGET BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS, BECAUSE PARALLEL PROGRAMMING HELPS SUPPORT LONG-TERM OUTCOMES FOR BOTH POPULATIONS. With persistent gender gaps in educational participation and achievement and access to opportunities, education stakeholders have long been proponents of enhanced supports for girls (Kwauk et al. 2018; Dupuy et al. 2018). However, the experiences of PSIPSE grantees generated some counterintuitive hypotheses around this issue, with several arguing that it was important to work with girls and boys simultaneously. Otherwise, they felt, girls would gain new confidence and aspirations that would not translate into long-term improvements in educational and life outcomes. For instance, these newly empowered girls may go on to marry young men who have traditional views about women's place in the world, who may not be supportive of their wives continuing their education or joining the workforce. American India Foundation formed boys groups to guard against this possibility and to position young men as well for success in school and life. In addition to conducting activities to foster self-realization and build decision making and goal-setting skills (much like the girls groups), these boys groups included tailored discussions about gender. These focused on helping boys rethink gender roles. The goal was to help them start to believe that girls too can accomplish a lot outside of the home and should have greater opportunities than they are afforded.

SOME LIFE SKILLS ARE MORE EASILY CULTIVATED AMONG YOUNGER POPULATIONS, THOUGH OTHERS ARE STILL MOST SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOPED IN THE ADOLESCENT YEARS. Life skills have become a strong focus for organizations preparing youth for the workforce, including several PSIPSE grantees. However, some PSIPSE grantees argue that life skills development cannot wait until school completion and transition to employment is imminent, particularly among marginalized groups. For example, CEDA noted that in its post-conflict setting younger girls were less "bruised by life" while older girls "have gone through so many hardships, so many abuses, that they feel like the world is against them." When they are younger

and have not yet experienced these trials, they are more certain of themselves and more confident of their future, and thus more easily set on CEDA's 5-D pathway to becoming independent, successful adults (see Figure 5.2).

This finding is supported to some extent by research. For instance, there is agreement that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills need to be cultivated during the early stages of a person's life cycle (prior to adolescence) as these skills develop progressively over time (Kautz et al. 2014; Gates et al. 2016). However, while cognitive and non-cognitive skills are malleable during early years, many non-cognitive skills can be shaped to a higher degree during adolescence (Kautz et al. 2014; Cunha et al. 2010; Brunello and Schlotter 2011). Researchers have identified specific skills, including self-identity, self-esteem, problem-solving, perseverance, and self-control, which are especially malleable during adolescence (Gates et al. 2016; Guerra and Cunningham 2014).

Figure 5.2. CEDA's 5-D pathway

CEDA's life skills intervention, implemented by youth mentors from the community and rolled out in weekly two-hour sessions over one year, follows a "5-D Cycle":

- **DISCOVER**, which fosters self-realization
- **DREAM**, which helps girls hone in on their aspirations
- **DESIGN**, which fosters goal setting and planning to achieve identified aspirations
- **DEVELOP**, which fosters cultivation of needed skills
- **DESTINY**, which helps girls concretize their vision for life after secondary school by reflecting on how their careers might benefit their communities and assessing job availability

A.4. INTERACTION WITH OTHER INTERVENTIONS

WHEN THE ULTIMATE PROGRAM GOAL IS TO PREPARE YOUTH FOR EMPLOYMENT, SUPPLEMENTING SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WITH HARD SKILLS TRAINING OR WORK PLACEMENTS CAN IMPROVE OVERALL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS.

Several PSIPSE projects that were focused on preparing youth for employment or entrepreneurship combined soft and hard skills training. They also gave students opportunities to apply these skills— through business clubs or internship placements. Grantees found that marrying these interventions helped attract student interest. By and large, these programs were effective in improving target employment outcomes. Specific examples are provided below:

EDC supplemented its work readiness curriculum, which had a strong focus on life skills development, with a work-based learning intervention. This entailed students obtaining internship placements to acquire the "skills that can only be gained through practical work experience: familiarity with a workplace environment, flexibility, training, etc." (EDC 2018). This was of enormous appeal to students. Indeed, on-the-ground partners who assisted students with obtaining placements reported that youth who went home for the holidays (outside of the intervention area) took initiative to find their own internships.³ EDC's program had tangible effects on employment. The organization, which conducted a randomized controlled trial following one year of program implementation, found that treatment youth were 7.6 percent more likely to be employed at endline than control youth. There were also significant differences in earnings between treatment and control youth. Eighty-one percent of the treatment group reported that earnings increased in the past six months, while only 71 percent of the control group reported the same (Alcid and Martin 2017).

³ EDC subsequently institutionalized this strategy during scale-up by having students use an introduction letter, parent and community networks, and ad hoc teacher support to find and obtain internships.



Educate! | Photo by PSIPSE/Zachary Rosen

Educate! also has a strong youth entrepreneurship and employment focus. It seeks to build employability skills among its target population through (1) mentor-led sessions that cultivate both soft and hard skills and that guide students on how to begin small entrepreneurial projects and (2) business clubs that allow interested students to take these projects further or start new businesses (as mentioned, Educate! also seeks to cultivate youth skills by training teachers to introduce active learning techniques in the classroom). An independent, quasi-experimental evaluation of Educate!'s program in Uganda found that it had substantial impacts on a variety of employment outcomes. For example, treatment youth were 11 percent more likely to own a business and 8 percent more likely to hold a job (Salam et al. 2016).

Plan International originally introduced only a life skills curriculum, known as Choose A Future!, but both youth and their parents wanted a clearer link to the job market. Accordingly, Plan arranged for vocational training in select, locally marketable skills. It also developed and added to its program an additional curriculum, known as Ready for Work, which focused on preparing youth for formal employment. Ready for Work (1) introduced youth to different career pathways; (2) familiarized them with the mechanics of how to look for a job (such as responding to a job advertisement, preparing a curriculum vitae, dressing for an interview, and responding to interview questions); and (3) provided guidelines on how to get and keep a job (such as how to select from multiple offers, negotiate a salary, and tackle conflict in the work place).

Milele Zanzibar Foundation (MZF) and VSO embed life skills development into their career awareness programming. MZF holds career days that are focused on a specific industry, e.g. the marine industry, which share information with students on not only key opportunities or avenues to explore, but also the key issues faced by the sector. Then, MZF holds hands-on science competitions that task students with developing practical solutions to an issue they learned about during career day. VSO also

5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED DESIGN OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

integrated skills acquisition wherever possible into its career awareness programming. For example, teachers running the career awareness program rarely provided information directly to students on the dos and don'ts of entering and staying in the job market. Rather, they elicited that information



Milele Zanzibar Foundation | Photo by PSIPSE/Zachary Rosen

from students. When preparing students for industry visits, for instance, they helped students brainstorm questions to ask company representatives.

Existing research shows that many youth development programs integrate life skills training with hard skills, vocational, or technical training. Examples of such programs include Kenya's Ninaweza, Uganda's BRAC girls club, and Liberia's Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (Adoho et al. 2014). In these programs, the technical trainings focus on building hard skills to increase youth employability in specific sectors, while the life skills trainings

focus on improving communication skills, self-esteem, and self-confidence in adolescents. Together, they have yielded positive results for employment or entrepreneurship outcomes, social empowerment outcomes (higher enrollment rates and lower early marriage rates), and health-related knowledge (increased knowledge of HIV and pregnancy topics) (Bandiera et al. 2014; Gates et al. 2016). Some studies even suggest that the most effective adolescent programs have a combination of hard skills and life skills in their programming (Dupuy et al. 2018; Heckman and Kautz 2012; Adhvaryu et al. 2016). For example, Heckman and Kautz (2012) demonstrated that those who participated in programs with an integrated focus on life and hard skills performed better in the labor market. This was echoed by Adhvaryu and colleagues (2016), who showed that non-cognitive or soft skills were as important for long-term economic success as technical and cognitive skills.

PARENTAL SENSITIZATION IS VITAL TO INTEGRATE INTO LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING, BUT DIFFICULT TO PROVIDE AT SCALE.

PSIPSE grantees at the pilot stage frequently integrate a parental outreach component into their programs. They argued that life skills development programs strengthen target skills to the fullest extent only if parents provide complementary supports. For example, APHRC conducts group-based counseling sessions for parents of students who participate in its literacy, numeracy, and life skills sessions. These counseling sessions focus on topics such as parent-child communication, understanding yourself and understanding your child, and parenting in the digital era. APHRC's mixed-methods evaluation found that the intervention had improved intergenerational communication and parental support. For instance, the pre-post quantitative component of the evaluation noted a substantial increase—from 55 percent at baseline to 69 percent at midline—in students reporting that they sometimes or always had adults "whom they could depend on for help when needed, or whom they could turn to for guidance in times of stress and were able to count on in case of an emergency, or talk to about important life decisions" (APHRC 2018). Furthermore, focus group discussions with parents and in-depth interviews with students revealed that participating parents had become better listeners, more open to discussion with their children, more supportive of girls' education, and overall more involved in their children's lives and their schooling. These changes in parents helped bolster emerging improvements in children's life skills, including self-realization and communication. For instance, children were more willing to share their

feelings and desires and talk about the challenges they were experiencing—at school or elsewhere.

Empirical research on this topic is limited. However, the above findings are in line with recent qualitative research, which suggests that parental buy-in or involvement may play a role in improving the outcomes of life skills programs. For example, qualitative studies of life skills programs in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Tanzania found that adolescents were encouraged by their parents to take part in life skills programs, and that the majority reported improved relations with their parents (Kashfi et al. 2012; Dupuy et al. 2018).

Although a comprehensive approach that integrates parental sensitization is ideal, it is challenging to implement at scale. However, scalable solutions are important to develop and test, given the importance of parental involvement and the budding interest in strategies for parental outreach among policymakers. The new Kenyan secondary school curriculum has a strong focus on parental involvement. PSIPSE grantees reported that policymakers in Kenya are eager to learn more about how to operationalize this—be it through the educational system (through bodies like parent-teacher associations), or outside of the educational system (by having community leaders hold parents accountable for their children's schooling and success).

PAIRING LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELING IS CRITICAL WHEN TARGET POPULATIONS HAVE UNDERGONE CONSIDERABLE HARDSHIP AND TRAUMA.

CIYOTA works with refugee students living in camps who have had difficult lives. Many have experienced war and violence in their home countries, and in the camps where they now live, they may face gender-based violence and continued security threats. Many also face considerable parental neglect. To help students tackle these challenges, CIYOTA has its points of contact in schools identify students who may need counseling. CIYOTA staff then provide this psychosocial support, which aims to help students gain mental and emotional resilience. With this support, students are also better positioned to benefit from the remedial classes and leadership and entrepreneurship sessions offered by CIYOTA, and ultimately complete and transition successfully out of secondary school.

The literature shows that youth in war-torn communities experience high levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation, among other problems, and calls for interventions to address their psychosocial and mental health needs (Kelly and Branham 2012; Panter-Brick et al. 2011; Klasen et al. 2010). It indicates, furthermore, that life skills interventions in such settings can offer youth critical psychosocial supports. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an evaluation of a psychosocial intervention involving life skills found a decline in symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety among conflict-affected girls (O'Callaghan et al. 2013).

B. DELIVERY OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

As noted, PSIPSE grantees took two key approaches to strengthening life skills—(1) implementing standalone life skills curricula (delivered by teachers or other mentors), and (2) training teachers to use active learning methods while teaching core academic subjects—that is, cultivating life skills through regular classroom instruction. In this section, we share lessons that are both specific to and common across these two approaches. We discuss lessons related to identifying and building the capacity of facilitators for life skills sessions (B.1), equipping teachers to cultivate life skills while teaching core subjects (B.2), mainstreaming gender issues into life skills development (B.3), and building an enabling environment for life skills development (B.4).

B.1. IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING FACILITATORS FOR STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS

TASKING TEACHERS WITH DELIVERING STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS CAN ENHANCE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, SUSTAINABILITY, AND SCALABILITY.

CEDA International used external facilitators to implement its afterschool life skills sessions for many years, but found this affected the program's consistency and continuity. CEDA initially recruited educated young women in the communities where target schools were based. However, attrition was high. These women stopped working with CEDA as they got married, had children, or found jobs elsewhere. Eventually, CEDA began to train teachers to act as mentors. Teachers are busy and overstretched, but they move away less often, and can also align classroom instruction with the life skills sessions to deliver consistent messaging to students.

More broadly, tasking teachers with implementing stand-alone life skills sessions can set a program up for scale—life skills “courses” can be cascaded through educational systems to reach and mobilize teachers. Certainly, identifying non-teacher mentors brings advantages—selected facilitators may have more time and interest in life skills, among other assets (described below). However, recruiting and training non-teacher mentors is often a localized endeavor, led by project teams. For instance, Plan International had local partner organizations and project support committees (formed of community leaders) reach out to their networks to identify suitable candidates. This approach is difficult to standardize and implement at scale.

TEACHERS CAN BE INCENTIVIZED TO TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY FOR STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS BY UNDERLINING THE BENEFITS THEY WILL ACCRUE.

The teachers PSIPSE grantees are working with are often overburdened, underpaid, and undermotivated. They are often disinclined to build new responsibilities into their schedules, particularly when these responsibilities do not help them gain tangible job benefits like promotions and pay increases. CEDA recommended acknowledging this reality; it leveraged its understanding of teachers' mindset to facilitate the implementation of its social and leadership skills sessions. Specifically, it sought to emphasize that “it's not just that you're helping us to do this, it's also that you're growing as an individual.” Specifically, it stressed how teachers would be able to strengthen their capabilities through training and other capacity-building activities.

Another strategy is to show teachers how different training sessions on life skills development and active learning techniques can be. CorStone reported that a key reason teachers were uninterested in participating was that they had experienced an overload of trainings, which they thought were “all the same” and generally unhelpful. However, their attitude changed when they were exposed to the “new, transformative material” and alternative, hands-on training methods of CorStone's capacity-building efforts.

CEDA also provided external opportunities to

“So many of [the teachers] say: ‘These are skills and assets that are going to help me in my life so much, this was really such a worthwhile training, and I cannot wait to impart this to my students. This was something that was really missing in what I had been doing and I had absolutely no idea, because we just don't talk about these things.’”

CORSTONE

teachers. They invited teachers to speak at community dialogues, and even events and functions in Kampala. They also involved teachers in entrepreneurship projects, together with the students (CEDA's PSIPSE project also involved vocational and entrepreneurship training). This gave teachers the opportunity to supplement their income and increased their energy and enthusiasm for the project. This approach may not be easy to expand across large intervention areas, but could be effective on a small scale.

THE IDEAL FACILITATORS ARE THOSE WHO HAVE HIGH EQ, AN ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND AND CONNECT WITH YOUTH EXPERIENCE. When target populations were particularly marginalized, or had had specific life experiences that had shaped that marginalization, PSIPSE grantees found it was important to ensure facilitators had backgrounds like those of the youth. For example, APHRC engaged mentors for its life skills sessions for youth in urban slums who have themselves grown up in those areas. This increased the credibility and effectiveness of the mentors—that is, students believed that if someone who had experienced the same challenges, risks, and insecurity could go on to a successful career or enroll in tertiary education, they could too.

"We are selecting [as mentors] young people who have been born and bred in a typical slum environment, but they have been able to sidestep the challenges that would otherwise have made them not continue with school. Right from the beginning, those mentors become role models, because these young people look at them and say, if this person has been able to live here and they did not drop out of school, or did not succumb to drugs or prostitution or other vices in the slum, and if they are saying to me that it is possible to continue with my schooling and succeed, then perhaps there is something in what they are saying."

APHRC

Plan International's selection approach was similar—it looked for youth in their 20s and 30s from its intervention area who were engaged in or giving back to their community. Plan also sought out individuals with strong intuition, who would be able to read a group of young people, take the temperature of the room, and tailor their approach accordingly. Plan stressed that this did not necessarily mean that facilitators needed to be extroverted. Rather, they needed strong instincts and emotional intelligence (EQ).

CRECCOM has student leaders facilitate its life skills sessions (with the support of teachers who act as "matrons" or "patrons"). To increase transparency and trust, CRECCOM has students elect their facilitators. It gives them criteria similar to those discussed above—to look for "someone who is not shy, someone who can inspire and motivate other students to respond, someone with a good reputation at the school."

IDENTIFYING MENTORS BY USING HIGHLY SPECIFIC CRITERIA IS DIFFICULT WHEN A PROGRAM IS OPERATING AT SCALE. For example, CorStone, which works with a large number of schools in the state of Bihar in India, initially provided a host of criteria to school heads for selecting teachers to run CorStone's resilience sessions. These included experience level, background in counseling, subject focus, and certain personality characteristics. However, given these criteria did not necessarily yield a strong pool of teacher-facilitators, and that CorStone was expanding its program to more schools each year, it narrowed

5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED DELIVERY OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

its criteria. It asked head teachers to select teachers with certain qualities—openness to new ideas and interest in hearing students' experiences—who also had enough time for the program.

TO EFFECTIVELY DELIVER STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS CURRICULA, TEACHERS MAY NEED TO “WALK BACK” THEIR INSTINCTS TO TEACH, AND INSTEAD LEARN TO FACILITATE, A TRANSITION THAT TRAINERS CAN SUPPORT THROUGH A VARIETY OF EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES. Several grantees said that training teachers to facilitate rather than teach was one of the most challenging aspects of implementing their life skills curricula. CEDA noted the difficulty of getting teachers to listen more and talk less during its social and leadership skills sessions. CorStone underlined how deeply ingrained hierarchy is in school culture, particularly in its target geographies (rural India and Kenya). Teachers are in a dominant position, and students are perceived to be at a different “level.” Grantees have implemented a variety of strategies to address these power dynamics and help teachers build a strong “facilitation muscle” (see Figure 5.3)

PRACTICE IS KEY TO DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS. PSIPSE grantees emphasized that life skills curricula should be delivered in a way that allows students to intensively practice key skills. Plan International's Choose a Future! Curriculum had practical exercises embedded in each of its modules. For example, in its problemsolving module, facilitators first introduced the STAR approach: Stop and recognize, Think and communicate, take Action, and Reflect and review. They then put forward two problem-solving scenarios that involved friends and family and had youth use the STAR approach and pre-written discussion guidelines to walk through those scenarios together (see Figure 5.4 for examples of problem-solving scenarios). Plan also tried to bundle skills to the extent possible, so that youth could practice how to apply multiple skills at once (a capability often needed in real-life situations). For example, creative problemsolving skills were reinforced in Choose a Future!'s conflict resolution module. Some grantees set the stage for interactive activities like these by directly orienting students to the practical nature of life skills development sessions. For example, CEDA underscored to its students that life skills are not to

Figure 5.3. Strategies used to help teachers pivot from teaching to facilitating

<p>ASSESS WHETHER STUDENTS OR TEACHERS WERE MORE VOCAL</p>	<p>Aflatoun noted that an easy rule of thumb to get teachers to facilitate more than teach is to ask them to assess at the end of each session who talked more—the teacher or the students. This exercise can help teachers become more aware of their propensity—if it exists—to provide information and messages rather than foster discussion and incrementally shape attitudes and build skills.</p>
<p>HAVE TEACHERS PRACTICE APPLYING KEY LIFE SKILLS</p>	<p>CEDA made an effort to illustrate to teachers that life skills sessions have an inherently different structure and focus from academically oriented classroom instruction. One strategy it adopted was to put teachers in new, potentially intimidating situations—such as asking them to speak at a community dialogue—so they could put themselves in the shoes of girls being asked to embrace a new confidence and speak in front of the classroom.</p>
<p>ESTABLISH A SENSE OF EQUALITY BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS</p>	<p>CorStone's life skills sessions begin with an Opening Circle to bring everyone together and establish a feeling of equality. A CorStone representative noted, “This can really be a bigger deal than one would think in these school settings, where the teacher, who has been at the front of the classroom and leading everybody, is suddenly at the same level and in the same circle as the student.”</p>
<p>“For them they are teachers. They want to be really commanding. It has been really hard for them to shift their whole role from being the one talking to the one listening or facilitating.” – CEDA International</p> <p>“This is something that people oftentimes do, when teaching life skills becomes more academic than actually about just experiencing the skill itself and learning it through experience. That's something we have to really keep in mind, you know, so we're not saying, 'Now we'll work on teamwork. Show us how you do teamwork.'” – Milele Zanzibar Foundation</p>	

Figure 5.4. Plan International's Choose a Future! curriculum: Sample problem solving scenarios

WITH FRIENDS

- Your mother/elder sister does not approve of all of your friends and wants you to stop seeing them.
- An older boy is bothering your sister. She comes to you for help.

WITH FAMILY

- Your father says you have to stop schooling because he can no longer afford to pay for your school fees. Only your brother will be allowed to go to school. You feel that you are being unfairly treated.

be learned in the same way that academic concepts are—"to be acquired one day for the test and forgotten the day after." It calls on them to practice these skills daily, until they become part of a new way of being.

FACILITATORS HAVE THE DIFFICULT JOB OF HELPING YOUTH SET ACHIEVABLE GOALS WHILE ALSO ENCOURAGING THEM TO GO AFTER THEIR ASPIRATIONS.

Aga Khan Foundation (India), which offered a mix of academic, vocational, and life skills programming to out-of-school girls in urban slums in India, noted that it was important to help beneficiaries right-size their expectations. Many young women who joined their program had dropped out of school as early as 4th or 5th grade. With the foundation's support, they sought to pass the vital 10th grade public examinations. Even parents were committed to this goal, because girls with this qualification are likely to find better educated husbands. The Aga Khan Foundation found it imperative to bring girls to the realization that this

would be a difficult task, so they would not face disappointment down the road should they fail to pass the examinations. At the same time, the foundation sought to ensure that girls did not lose their motivation and aspirations. They used several strategies for this purpose. First, they leveraged the diversity of job opportunities available in India's large cities (in this case, Patna and Hyderabad) to offer girls a vision of all the exciting pathways they could follow. Second, they encouraged girls to take examinations through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), which are designed to help those who have dropped out of school gain educational qualifications. NIOS offers a strong curriculum, but its examinations are structured such that they do not require several years of practice in high-intensity test-taking.

FACILITATORS CAN PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN ENSURING THAT STUDENTS DO NOT BECOME RELIANT ON PROGRAM SUPPORTS.

The evidence base indicates that frequent contact between mentors and beneficiaries over significant periods of time can be key to the success of youth mentorship programs (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper 2002; Rhodes and Bogat 2002). In fact, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) show that the impact of such programs increases as these mentorships mature, and that short-lived mentorships can have negative effects (for example, decline in self-worth and perceived academic competency) on targeted youth. Because it is difficult to sustain long-term mentorships in practice, Aflatoun and KTO have designed their program to preempt such dependencies. Specifically, they have embedded a strong focus on independence and self-reliance in their program. Facilitators and daycare workers reinforce to the target population (teenage girls with children) that they have responsibilities as young mothers. They stress that their actions have a direct influence on the wellbeing of their sons and daughters. Even simple steps like explaining to students what is not appropriate—dressing their children in dirty clothes, forgetting to feed them breakfast, etc.—and underscoring that they will need to fix these issues themselves, are helpful in boosting independence.

B.2. EQUIPPING TEACHERS TO CULTIVATE LIFE SKILLS WHILE TEACHING CORE SUBJECTS

IMPLEMENTING SPECIFIC ACTIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES IN THE CLASSROOM CAN HELP TEACHERS OR FACILITATORS CULTIVATE LIFE SKILLS AMONG THEIR TARGET POPULATIONS. PSIPSE grantees have rolled out a variety of useful techniques in the classroom:

Weekly foundational story [LGIHE]: In English lessons, the teacher shares a simple written story. To help students understand the story, he/she asks them questions, and requests them to draw a picture of what struck them the most about the story. The teacher then asks them to write the sequel of the story. This "allows them to express themselves and say what they really believe without having the preoccupation of pleasing the teacher ... there is a whole bunch of creativity growing in the students this way without creativity being actively 'taught'."

Language experience approach [LGIHE]: Because students often have poor vocabularies, the teacher asks them to share a story, perhaps about something they do at home, in whatever words they know. Or teachers may ask students to draw out what they want to say. Finally, students are asked to write out key words related to the story, potentially with the teacher's help. These words are henceforth linked to students' personal experience.

Use primary sources [LGIHE]: In history lessons, teachers have students compare and contrast primary and secondary sources to decipher for themselves how certain historical events unfolded. The process of understanding written texts is a higher order thinking skill.

Explaining concepts instead of structuring instruction around test questions [LGIHE]: LGIHE noted that teachers have a propensity to cover critical content—especially in STEM subjects—by walking students through how they will be tested on it. This leads to acquisition of test-taking skills and tricks, but does not foster internalization of concepts and, in turn, students' ability to apply these concepts outside of school. See Figure 5.5 for an example of how teaching to the test can work against independent thinking.

Community-based projects [AKF, USA]: Teachers trained by Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, have students pinpoint a problem in their community, do research on it by developing and answering targeting research questions, and identify and execute a solution. This helps strengthen students' critical thinking, research, and problem-solving skills.

Context-based learning [Milele Zanzibar Foundation]: Teachers offer scenarios, stories, field trip observations, and visual and audiovisual inputs related to local STEM issues, have students engage in

Figure 5.5. Teaching to the test—a classroom observation

"I was observing a class of mathematics for senior 5 students who are in the middle level of mathematics, and the teacher was teaching them how to calculate the mean. He showed on the blackboard that if there are 11 numbers, the mean is the number that has 5 numbers on the left and 5 numbers on the right. After several students asked for clarifications and didn't get clear answers, I asked if the teacher would change just one of the numbers in the list. Then the rule no longer held. But the teacher's response was that the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) always put in questions that have the mean in the middle, with five numbers on one side, and five numbers on the other. Removing the actual explanation and going straight towards what UNEB asks does not help students **develop the ability to think independently.**"

- LGIHE representative

discussion to link this contextual material with key STEM concepts, and engage in hands-on experiments and other demonstration or measurement activities. This helps build students' problemsolving, team work, and self-directed learning skills.

A PHASED APPROACH IS SUITABLE FOR TRAINING CORE SUBJECT TEACHERS ON HOW TO DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS THROUGH ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS.

Learner-centered techniques are not easily acquired, because they often require teachers to "unlearn" rote learning methods they have been implementing for the entire course of their career. They are also challenging for teachers because they entail a release in control. Teachers are asked to be comfortable with not always being in the driver's seat and with letting students shape their own thinking. To facilitate this shift in mindset and capacity, teacher training is ideally rolled out over an extended period of time. This allows teachers to see the value of active learning techniques, become more comfortable with them, and practice and refine key methods. Teacher training is also ideally implemented in phases. This ensures that teachers are not overwhelmed and can strengthen one technique (or a set of techniques) before they move on to another.

GESCI's ICT integration program follows this approach, providing teacher training and capacitybuilding in three phases over three years. These are **technology literacy**, when teachers learn how to use relevant software and ICT tools; **knowledge deepening**, when teachers design classroom activities that integrate ICT approaches; and **knowledge creation**, when teachers help students incorporate multimedia and web technologies into their own projects to support learning. GESCI also maps each phase to specific 21st century skills. For example, in the technology literacy phase, teachers are asked to focus on cultivating critical thinking and collaboration. And in the knowledge deepening phase, they are tasked with strengthening communication and creativity. By pairing active learning techniques with skills, and introducing them in phases, life skills development becomes more manageable and achievable for teachers.

B.3. MAINSTREAMING GENDER ISSUES INTO LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

GENDER-RELATED ISSUES ARE BEST INTRODUCED SUBTLY IN CONSERVATIVE COMMUNITIES IN ORDER TO WIN THE COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT AND SHIFT GIRLS' ATTITUDES INCREMENTALLY.

ActionAid flagged that taking a gender lens to life skills development is especially critical in its intervention areas, all located in rural parts of northern Nigeria. Attitudes about traditional gender roles are pervasive in these conservative communities, with many perceiving girls as somehow "lesser than" boys. Community members are also apprehensive about their girls being "corrupted" by nontraditional values. Given this context, ActionAid's gender mainstreaming approach is understated. For example, when community leaders are sitting in on sessions (which they do at first to ensure the NGO is not sharing unsuitable information), ActionAid is

"This is the way the teacher has been groomed over the centuries. This is how the teacher was trained in the teacher training institution. So we're swimming upstream. For example, when we tried to have teachers prepare ICT-integrated lesson plans, it was a fight, because they told us they stopped preparing lesson plans in college. So it's changing the mindset, changing the habits, having the teacher stay up in the evening to research and prepare a presentation."

GESCI

careful not to raise comparisons with boys. The messaging is never “you can do just as well as the boys” (an important message, because the girls themselves think that only boys can “top the class”). Instead, it is, “You can do better than you did last time; you can keep improving.” ActionAid is also conscious of religious sensitivity, and steers clear of any topics that may be perceived as running counter to the Quran and other holy books. For example, ActionAid ensures that issues of sexuality are treated in an age and culturally appropriate manner. CRECCOM also emphasized the importance of “treading lightly” with sensitive issues like sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in conservative cultures. In developing its curriculum and guiding its facilitators on what kinds of SRH information to share, it has sought to maintain a balance—increasing youth awareness of key SRH topics without being too explicit.

GENDER SENSITIVITY TRAINING CAN HELP ENSURE THAT TEACHERS/FACILITATORS ARE NOT UNDERMINING THE INFLUENCE OF LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING ON GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT. CEDA has had to integrate into its training for teachers a strong focus on gender equality, because male teachers in its target schools are given to using harsh, disempowering language when speaking to their female students—for example, that girls are failures, all they can do is get married, they will never amount to anything, etc. CEDA's main strategy has been to make male teachers aware of the impact of their words and how destructive their language can be to emerging confidence and self-worth. Many teachers, as it turned out, had simply not realized how harsh their words were, or how they might be perceived by female students.

This finding finds some support in the literature, which reveals that training teachers to adopt a gendersensitive pedagogy can be beneficial to girls' educational experience. For example, Santhya et al. (2015) find that nondiscriminatory treatment by teachers and teachers' expression of gender egalitarian attitudes are associated with better attitudes among all students (and higher test scores for female students).

B.4. BUILDING A STRONG ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN A SCHOOL SETTING REQUIRES BUY-IN FROM SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIONS. This holds true both for interventions designed to strengthen life skills by transforming core subject teachers' pedagogical techniques, and for interventions that hold stand-alone life skills sessions. For example, LGEHE argued that the active learning techniques it trains teachers on require substantial time; a 40-minute lesson is rarely adequate. Thus, LGEHE notes, a close partnership with the school administration is vital to the successful implementation of these techniques. School leaders must be convinced of their importance and willing to modify timetables and lengthen lessons to accommodate their rollout in the classroom. (In some contexts, approvals for revising timelines may even need to come from more senior government officials.)

Similarly, CorStone, which implements its stand-alone resilience sessions during one period each week, also works hard to build program ownership among school principals. This ensures that implementation runs smoothly. For instance, because principals are asked to select teachers to run the resilience sessions, they are also more likely to help problem-solve when these teachers are not fully delivering on their responsibilities or facing challenges in rolling out the curriculum.



LGIHE | Photo by PSIPSE/Zachary Rosen

C. MEASURING LIFE SKILLS AND EVALUATING LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

In this section, we glean lessons from grantees' efforts to measure their target life skills and evaluate their programs. As mentioned, some grantees use measurement of life skills as an **intervention strategy**, which we discuss first. We then provide overarching lessons around embedding monitoring, evaluation, and learning into life skills programs.

C.1. MEASURING LIFE SKILLS AS AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY

EXAMINATIONS CAN HELP INCENTIVIZE CULTIVATION OF LIFE SKILLS. A critical challenge many organizations face as they promote adoption of life skills programming is that acquisition of life skills is not incentivized by educational systems. Existing curricula that teachers are structuring their instruction around are not geared to strengthen critical life skills such as deductive reasoning. So when educators "teach to the test" in an effort to set their students up to pass examinations, they do not cultivate these nonacademic competencies. LGIHE recognizes and leverages this reality in its PSIPSE project. It uses assessment as a vehicle to encourage a focus on life skills in the classroom. Specifically, it is working with the Uganda National Examinations Board to introduce test items into the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) examinations that require students to exercise higher order thinking skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and imagination.

Educate! noted that Uganda's "general paper," an examinable subject, is a particularly good candidate for cultivating life skills. General paper is a multidisciplinary subject that fosters examination of a range of social, cultural, and philosophical issues and helps students form and express ideas and arguments about these issues. Examination questions require critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and creativity.

HOWEVER, NOT ALL SKILLS ARE EASY TO INTEGRATE INTO ACADEMIC CURRICULA OR TEST THROUGH EXAMINATIONS.

Some grantees noted that the imperative to integrate testing into life skills coursework can de-emphasize vital skills. For example, Aflatoun and KTO reported that their partner vocational institutions have traditionally structured their life skills such that they build up to a final examination. This results in coursework that prioritizes testable skills and knowledge, such as what to say during a job interview. Indeed, a key reason why the Kenyan government's former life skills curriculum was not successfully rolled out was the focus of the curriculum on content rather than skill. Education stakeholders in Kenya noted that the curriculum was comprehensive, but covered creativity and communication as topics in the abstract instead of building them as skills.

LGIHE itself, which is seeking to motivate life skills development by modifying examinations, argued that not all life skills are suitable for testing. It selected critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and imagination as its target life skills because these were easier to embed in the curriculum and test and cultivate through assessments. Other life skills, it contends, are more easily developed through active learning methods in the classroom or other in-person settings. The challenge once again is how to incentivize teachers or others to implement those methods when there is not a clear payoff by way of improved student performance on examinations. A parallel issue is that students are also most concerned about material covered by examinations, and as a result may have limited interest and enthusiasm in interactive activities in the classroom (Cosentino and Sridharan 2017).

C.2. EMBEDDING MONITORING AND EVALUATION INTO LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

IT IS VITAL TO DEVELOP SIMPLE TOOLS TO ASSESS YOUTH LIFE SKILLS ON AN ONGOING BASIS. A key challenge in tracking the progress of life skills programming, or assessing its impact, is measuring the acquisition of and improvement in life skills. Hindering life skills measurement are several issues. For one, most tools rely on self-reports, which can yield biased results—with respondents providing desirable responses. Respondents also often rate themselves relative to their peers, which can preclude comparisons across programs and over time. Another challenge in tracking progress from one point in time to another is that youth can become more perceptive of their own skill levels, as a result reducing self-reported scores over time even if the intervention was successful in strengthening certain skills (Galloway et al. 2017). While these are daunting challenges, there are tools in place that seek to address them. USAID's YouthPower Action project has put together an extensive inventory of tools employed by international development programs to measure life skills, rating them according to key criteria such as measure validity, reliability, ease of use, etc. (Galloway et al. 2017). Within the PSIPSE, EDC is working with a professional test developer to create a tool that is both "easy to use and psychometrically rigorous" for teachers in East Africa to assess four key life skills among their students. Some of the lessons that EDC learned on how to develop assessment tools for teachers and other practitioners are summarized in Figure 5.6.

Going forward, there is need to develop a common set of tools that can be used widely across the globe to measure life skills. This can eliminate confusion and uncertainty about how to measure life skills among practitioners newer to the field. It can also facilitate comparison across programs and the development of a stronger evidence base. Ideally, since life skills vary by program goal, a constellation of tools would be developed—for example, one that is focused on life skills linked to work force outcomes, another that is focused on life skills that are known to increase resilience, etc. Tailored tools may also need to be developed across different youth age groups. Across the board, it is vital that these tools supplement self-reports with other more unbiased means of measuring life skills, without becoming too difficult to

Figure 5.6. Key considerations in developing tools to measure life skills

EDC is developing a tool that teachers and other practitioners can use to measure their students' employability-related life skills (communication, interpersonal skills, dependability, and problem-solving/critical thinking), and accordingly shift their teaching practices and guidance to students). The tool, which takes the form of a written assessment administered to students, is undergoing several rounds of testing in Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda. Below are some of the lessons that have emerged from the tool development process:

1. **Ensure the skills are distinct enough from one another so they are reliably measured and explained.** There is substantial overlap and complementarity between the range of life skills youth need to become successful adults. EDC found that it needed to identify four broadly defined, distinct life skills in order to avoid measurement challenges and give youth an accurate measure of their acquisition of each skill.
2. **To foster use of the tool in the classroom, it should measure skills and use terms that are "real" for people.** Because it needs to be used quickly in the classroom by non-measurement experts, EDC has designed the tool to measure easy-to-understand, practical skills, including communication, interpersonal skills, dependability, problem solving, and critical thinking.
3. **Develop the tool for contexts where literacy will not be a challenge.** EDC selected to have the tool tailored for students who had at least two years of secondary schooling so the items in the tool would be measuring soft skills only, not literacy levels.

"The big thing was that we wanted to be able to measure each skill reliably enough that we could say to a youth, 'You're doing well in this area, not so well in this area.'" - EDC

administer. In addition, the tools should ideally be developed such that they can accurately capture change over time (for instance, by integrating finer grain response scales than Likert scales) (Galloway et al. 2017).

IT IS IMPORTANT AND USEFUL TO EMBED IMPACT EVALUATIONS INTO LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING. As noted, only five PSIPSE projects conducted or commissioned impact evaluations of their work. (Two more have evaluations planned.) If feasible, organizations that are implementing innovative and promising life skills programming should support evaluations of these efforts. The evidence base in this space—particularly on life skills work in developing countries—is still growing. New evaluations could therefore not only inform program improvement and scale-up, but also help answer several outstanding questions in the literature—concerning the long-term impacts of life skills development for youth, the impact of life skills programming on academic and psychosocial outcomes, the variable effects of cultivating specific life skills, the scale-up of life skills programs, and more.

D. SUSTAINING AND SCALING LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING

In this section, we discuss the lessons that emerged from PSIPSE grantee experiences on how to strengthen sustainability of life skills programs (D.1) and how to successfully advocate for and facilitate scale-up of life skills programs (D.2). Note that any considerations around how to design for scale are in Section A above. We also do not cover alternative models for scale-up that are not government-led (these were not prevalent in the portfolio of 18 life skills projects we studied).

D.1. ENSURING PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

FORMING AND INSTITUTIONALIZING PROJECT SUPPORT COMMITTEES CAN ENSURE THAT PROGRAMMING CONTINUES INTO THE FUTURE. Some PSIPSE grantees created committees composed of influential local

community members to guide and ensure the sustainability of program activities. For instance, Plan International's project support committees supported project implementation (for example, by helping to recruit beneficiaries and identify facilitators), and socialized the project with the community at large. At the end of the project, Plan helped the committees become independent community-based organizations (CBOs), intending that they would help sustain project activities. It helped the CBOs register and find office space and trained them in strategic planning, mentoring and coaching, transparent data collection, and communication of results. Plan also provided seed funding to the CBOs to help them kick off their activities. The CBOs are currently working with young people in the community to identify which aspects of Plan's BLOOM+ project to continue. They are intensifying their resource mobilization activities to raise additional funds to continue the program.

ENGAGING KEY INFLUENCERS OF THE TARGET POPULATION, SUCH AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS, AND SHOWCASING PROGRAM SUCCESSES, CAN STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABILITY. Several grantees noted that in addition to working with students directly, it was important to engage with the multiple actors in their ecosystem, including teachers, school principals, parents, and community gatekeepers. By convincing these actors of the importance of the program's long- and short-term goals, and illustrating its effectiveness, the prospects for sustainability are increased. For example, American India Foundation worked hard on building support from community leaders in the remote villages of Gujarat, India, where its PSIPSE project is based. For instance, it celebrated girls' achievements in community forums and had community leaders act as guests of honor in key program ceremonies and give awards and certificates to program participants. With this involvement, community leaders sensed they had a stake in the program. Their frequent interaction with beneficiaries of the program also gave them a firsthand view of its influence, particularly on the confidence and communication skills of participating students. This created a virtuous cycle, incrementally increasing community buy-in for the program. This, the American India Foundation contended, will prevent the impacts of its program from receding once implementation is complete.



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D.2. SCALE-UP IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

IDENTIFY EDUCATION- OR YOUTH-FOCUSED GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE LOOKING FOR A REFRESHED VISION, AND PARTNER WITH THEM TO SCALE PROMISING LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING.

Life skills do not often have a ready home within the government, given their relevance to a variety of sectors or spaces, including early childhood development, secondary schooling, employment and

entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and reproductive health. This creates a challenge for scale-up because there are not always obvious stakeholders or bodies within government to partner with. One way to narrow the search for potential partners is to assess which relevant education or youth-focused government bodies are at a transition point or looking to update their strategy. For example, Aflatoun and KTO partner with Tanzania's Folk Development Colleges, which were operating under the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, and Children, but were recently transitioned to the Ministry of

Education, Science, and Technology. As part of the transition, the colleges, which had been focusing mainly on vocational training, are hoping to realize their original, broader vision of working at the intersection of adult education, vocational training, and community development. Aflatoun and KTO are partnering with them as they re-examine their identity and build their vision and strategy for becoming more comprehensive adult learning institutions. This transitional juncture is an apt time to partner with these institutions and integrate and scale a comprehensive life skills curriculum.

TO “SELL” GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, THE RIGHT VOCABULARY IS NEEDED, AS IS A CLEAR AND EVIDENCE-BASED LINK TO THE GOVERNMENT’S TARGET OUTCOMES. CorStone highlighted the importance of using the right vocabulary when discussing life skills development programs with government officials. Its program focuses on building “resilience,” a concept unfamiliar to many government officials in Kenya and India, with some thinking it meant disaster preparedness. So in each context, CorStone brought in different terms that resonated—including character strengths and values. In some cases, it even used folk stories to explain the concepts it hoped to focus on.

EDC took a more intensive approach to explaining life skills to government officials in a persuasive way. To win the support of the Rwanda Education Board’s entrepreneurship subject curriculum review committee, it trained the committee on its curriculum. As part of the training, it had committee members engage in the activities and exercises set forth in the curriculum. This gave committee members, who initially found the concept of life skills somewhat amorphous, a more real understanding of how the curriculum would prepare students for the world of work (Laterite 2017).

It is also vital to give government officials the “tools” to advocate for life skills development, specifically evidence that life skills programs meaningfully improve outcomes that are a priority for the government. In India, CorStone’s resilience program had a health focus, and its case for scale-up was bolstered by strong evidence emerging from an RCT that its program improved the government’s priority adolescent health indicators. It plans to do an RCT in Kenya as well, this time measuring the effectiveness of its program in improving critical education indicators.

SCALING PROGRAMS THAT DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT CAN REQUIRE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION, WHICH CAN BE DIFFICULT TO FOSTER. Educate! noted that although scaling through schools required partnership with the Ministry of Education, engaging youth mentors and fostering youth leadership relied on collaboration with the Ministry of Youth. In fact, scaling its integrated teacher training and youth mentorship program necessitated collaboration between the two ministries—for even practical matters such as getting permission for youth mentors to enter and work in secondary schools. This was challenging to bring about. Collaboration does not regularly happen unless there are formal platforms for it—such as joint task forces. Establishing these is a bureaucratic and time-consuming endeavor.

SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT TO SUCCESSFULLY SCALE A LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM REQUIRES CAREFUL STREAMLINING OF EACH INDIVIDUAL COMPONENT OF THE PROGRAM. Grantees have streamlined:

Training: CorStone predicted that government trainers assigned to roll out its resilience program would not come to their new role with the depth of knowledge and skill that its own master trainers took many years to acquire. To ease the burden on these government trainers, and ensure fidelity to the program model, it is planning on relying on technology-assisted training methods. For instance, its original in-person trainings involved the master trainers conducting demonstrations of curricular modules. Now, as the program is scaled, government trainers will instead show video recordings of these demonstrations and then facilitate discussion of what trainees observed. This is a significant

change—CorStone's assessments of its scale-up effort will shed light on how effective this streamlined training approach is in preparing teachers to implement its resilience curriculum.

Ongoing support: In its original model, CorStone conducted site visits to schools to provide ongoing support to teachers in between its three offsite trainings. In the scale-up model, this support will be provided through other existing platforms, such as monthly government meetings that teachers are required to attend. EDC is also working to identify easy-to-implement strategies for ensuring that entrepreneurship teachers across Rwanda receive the support they need on a regular basis to implement its work readiness curriculum. First, it recommended that the Ministry of Education identify and train lead trainers at the district rather than the national level—so they are within easier reach of schools and can conduct regular refresher training for teachers. It also suggested strengthening head teachers' ownership of the rollout of the entrepreneurship curriculum. Specifically, it recommended making them accountable for the implementation of school-based trainings on the curriculum—by building this into their performance contracts.

Monitoring: CorStone is adapting its monitoring tools for government and developing easy-to-use dashboards that officials can use to track implementation progress and quality. The dashboards include indicators and benchmarks related to teacher motivation and skill level, such that teachers' interest and performance can be measured regularly and used to inform adjustments to ongoing support strategies.

A STRONG SCALE-UP PLAN IDENTIFIES WHICH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS COULD TAKE ON EACH PROGRAM-RELATED TASK AND PROVIDES THEM THE NEEDED TRAINING. Transitioning a program to government requires an assessment of who has the willingness and who has (or can make) the time to take on each project responsibility, and then strengthening their capacity as needed. EDC began from the top down by training master trainers contracted by the Rwanda Education Board and the Workforce Development Authority, who would in turn train teachers in secondary schools and TVET institutions respectively. Also, an external scale and sustainability report examining EDC's activities recommended that to ensure that the program continues to be successful at scale, mid-level managers such as school managers and district education officers also be trained (Laterite 2017). These officials, who are responsible for monitoring teaching quality, can help ensure fidelity to the curriculum as well as its quality of delivery.

STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS ARE MOST SUCCESSFULLY SCALED THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IF THEY CAN BE ALIGNED WITH SCHOOL CALENDARS AND INTEGRATED INTO CLASS SCHEDULES. Several grantees have had to pilot their life skills sessions by implementing them after school or on the weekend. However, at the scale-up stage, the sessions may need to be incorporated into class schedules in order to ensure they are regularly implemented. For instance, the government of the state of Bihar in India has recently mandated that one period per week be reserved in middle schools for CorStone's resilience sessions. This is a pivotal step that will set CorStone's model up for scale, and is a result of extensive orientations and trainings for government officials, which increased their awareness of CorStone's activities and results on the ground and heightened their enthusiasm and support for the program.

For the purposes of scale-up, it is also important to introduce life skills development at a time that is palatable to all key stakeholders, including policymakers, school administrations, teachers, students, and parents. Several grantees have been careful to introduce life skills development at grade levels that do not entail high-stakes public examinations.

6 SUMMARY AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the lessons discussed above, we offer a set of key considerations for education stakeholders committed to strengthening youth life skills through innovative, scalable programming. Summarized below are recommendations for practitioners that are developing, refining, or scaling life skills programming. Figure 6.1 offers recommendations tailored for policymakers.

- 1. SYSTEMATICALLY DIAGNOSE THE LIFE SKILLS YOUTH NEED.** As our literature scan revealed, there are a range of ways that life skills are defined, with different disciplines and organizations identifying different sets of competencies that qualify as life skills. Individual programs and projects, therefore, need to make strategic decisions about which skills are most relevant for their work. Ideally, they would identify target skills based on the program's goal. For example, to help students transition into the workforce, programs would cultivate a broad set of cognitive skills, personal strengths, and interpersonal skills. To facilitate primary-to-secondary transition and reduce dropout during secondary school, programs would develop personal strengths such as self-esteem and confidence and interpersonal skills such as negotiation.

Ideally, programs would also take the target population's needs into consideration when determining which skills to emphasize. For example, projects that work with marginalized populations such as teenage mothers and youth in post-conflict areas generally focus on developing a sense of self-realization and self-worth in youth before transitioning to strengthening other life skills. In contrast, projects that work with out-of-school youth, in addition to focusing on those qualities, may also seek to strengthen specific life skills related to employability, such as dependability and collaboration.

To ensure that target skills are tied to program goals, organizations could engage in backwards mapping—from goals to intermediate outcomes to the competencies youth need to achieve those outcomes and goals. Needs assessments can also help programs pinpoint skills that youth require to navigate their specific circumstances. These typically entail systematically collecting and analyzing data—from both youth and stakeholders like teachers and employers, who influence youth outcomes. Organizations would ideally also look to the literature to identify their target life skills. However, the current evidence base may not allow for this; most studies conducted to date do not examine the variable effects of different types of life skills on target outcomes.

- 2. IF SEEKING TO STRENGTHEN LIFE SKILLS AMONG LARGE POPULATIONS, MODIFY HOW CORE SUBJECTS ARE TAUGHT, BUT IF CATERING TO THE SPECIALIZED NEEDS OF A MARGINALIZED GROUP, CONSIDER OPTING FOR STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS.** Having core subject teachers modify their pedagogy or otherwise change classroom practices is the most scalable way to strengthen life skills. It is, however, limited in its influence. For instance, implementing active learning techniques could foster development of key higher order thinking skills and certain interpersonal skills such as communication. But active learning may be less effective in building personal strengths and other interpersonal skills (such as social awareness and negotiation), which are of paramount importance for youth populations that are particularly vulnerable or undergoing significant hardship. For these groups, a standalone life skills curriculum may be the best fit. Providing these youth with the devoted attention and support of a mentor, and giving them the space to reflect on their interests and aspirations, can help significantly boost their resilience. Ideally, of course, both strategies would be



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implemented at once, with modifications in core subject instruction developing a finite set of core life skills at scale, and standalone sessions supplementing them as needed. However, this is frequently infeasible—given resource constraints and organizations' expertise in one or the other strategy. Hence we recommend deciding which strategy to pursue based on the size and characteristics of the target population.

- 3. TO FOSTER SCALABILITY, RECRUIT TEACHERS TO CONDUCT STAND-ALONE LIFE SKILLS SESSIONS, BUT IMPLEMENT TARGETED SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROVIDE RIGOROUS CAPACITY-BUILDING TO ENSURE THEY CAN ACT AS GOOD MENTORS.** PSIPSE grantees often opted to have teachers conduct stand-alone life skills sessions—a strategy that increases program efficiency and consistency (there is lower attrition among teachers than there is for external facilitators). The strategy is also scalable—training on life skills sessions can be cascaded through educational systems to teachers across large geographic areas. There are two key risks in contracting teachers to conduct life skills sessions, however. First, teachers are often overburdened with work and have limited interest in taking on new responsibilities. To address this concern, PSIPSE grantees suggest implementing simple but targeted criteria for selecting teachers— openness to new ideas, interest in hearing students' experiences, and bandwidth to assume a new role.

Second, teachers are more comfortable with providing information than they are with eliciting insights and brokering discussion, which are important steps in building young people's selfrealization, confidence, critical thinking skills, and communication skills. PSIPSE projects have found that a useful strategy for helping teachers shift away from this mindset and approach—and learn how to facilitate sessions effectively—is to help them strengthen their own life skills. Trainings for teachers would ideally support that goal, and also offer other practical techniques that teachers can use to facilitate rather than teach life skills sessions. The trainings would ideally also use interactive, hands-on techniques and stress that they are covering a new and thought-provoking topic. This could help attract and maintain interest among teachers, who tend to be disenchanted by the prospect of "just another training".

4. **GIVE TEACHERS A STRONG INCENTIVE TO CULTIVATE LIFE SKILLS WHILE TEACHING CORE SUBJECTS POTENTIALLY BY MODIFYING EXAMINATIONS TO TEST FOR THESE SKILLS.**

The main approach that PSIPSE grantees use to cultivate life skills through core subjects is to have teachers implement learner-centered methods in the classroom. This is a difficult ask, for some of the same reasons that it is challenging to get teachers to take on stand-alone life skills sessions. For instance, teachers have limited time to concertedly learn and internalize new techniques and implement them in the classroom. Teachers also have rote learning methods deeply ingrained in their approach to teaching. It is critical, therefore, to offer them incentives to modify their pedagogical approach.

Examinations offer a strong vehicle for change in teachers' mindset and pedagogy. Because teachers are held accountable for examination results, modifying these assessments to test for higher order thinking skills can motivate teachers to cultivate these skills—through active learning methods or other techniques. Modifying examinations would also increase students' motivation to work towards building life skills—by participating in interactive activities in the classroom or other methods. Note that examinations are but one approach to incentivizing a focus on life skills, and moreover, may not be an appropriate tool for assessing all types of life skills. Overall, more innovation and research are needed on how to drive change in teacher and student mindsets and behaviors related to life skills.

5. **WHEN THE GOAL IS TO PREPARE YOUTH FOR EMPLOYMENT, COMBINE LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTIONS WITH HARD SKILLS OR VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND OTHER DIRECT LINKAGES TO THE WORK FORCE.**

Life skills programming may be a tough sell for youth and their parents at first, because they might be uncertain about the tangible advantages that life skills can yield. Pairing life skills interventions with vocational training, on-the-job training, and/or internship placements can help alleviate this concern and increase demand for and interest in the overall program. This strategy also offers youth a platform to apply and strengthen their life skills and helps them obtain and succeed in long-term job placements. Indeed, research suggests that those who participate in programs that have an integrated focus on life and hard skills perform better in the labor market.

6. **BUILD STRONG, MIXED METHODS EVALUATIONS INTO LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS THAT ARE BEYOND THE PILOT STAGE— THEY CAN FOSTER PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, SUPPORT SCALE-UP, AND ADD TO THE GROWING KNOWLEDGE BASE.**

With a few exceptions, PSIPSE life skills projects did not prioritize evaluation (though several did undertake monitoring efforts). This is not unexpected, given many were new projects that were testing life skills and other approaches for the first time, and making substantial design modifications on the basis of what they were learning. However, some more established projects could have benefited from conducting or commissioning evaluations, to the extent they had the needed resources available. Building evaluation into program plans can arm program implementers with critical insights on how to identify target life skills, improve program implementation, make progress toward target outcomes, and prepare programs for scale-up. Evidence of program effectiveness can also help make the case for scale-up to policymakers. Finally, rigorous evidence would be an important contribution to the literature on life skills in developing countries. As noted, this research base is still growing, with continued gaps in understanding around how life skills programming can influence academic and psychosocial outcomes and shape young people's lives in the long term. There is also limited literature on the replication and scale-up of these efforts. Organizations developing innovative new life skills programs have the opportunity to contribute to the evidence base and strengthen our collective understanding of (1) how to cultivate life skills, (2) how life skills can impact a variety of critical youth outcomes, and (3) how to scale promising life skills programs.

Figure 6.1. Key considerations for policymakers

As seen in Chapter 4, several PSIPSE countries are in the process of developing new life skills policies. Below we summarize a few potential takeaways from this study on how to successfully devise, roll out, scale, and strengthen such policies.

1. Use context-specific needs assessments to inform the development of life skills policies.

Life skills policies are a strong opportunity for governments to prepare youth to be empowered, productive adults that are contributing to their communities and advancing economic growth. To seize this opportunity and craft promising life skills policies, we recommend that policymakers commission comprehensive needs assessments. These should first seek to identify what life skills to develop on a large scale by working backwards from national/sub-national goals (e.g. support transition from primary to secondary schools, foster girls' empowerment, strengthen a specific industry, etc.). Depending on the goals, the methods used to hone in on the needed life skills may vary—from surveying employers and youth to interviewing education experts and practitioners. Next, the needs assessment should assess what types of programming and activities are needed to meet those goals. Key informant interviews might again yield useful insights—with both local and international experts. Systematic reviews of life skills programming (such as those referenced in Chapter 3) might also shed light on what has and has not worked in improving the selected life skills. Finally, the needs assessment could also inform the operational plan for implementing the life skills policy—gathering information from staff at the relevant government agencies about the resources needed, availability of staff to oversee policy rollout, the capacity and expertise of these staff in life skills development, and potential technical partners.

2. Convene a working group comprised of practitioners and researchers, who have deep experience in life skills programming.

Given that life skills are a new or emerging area in many countries, and that the mandate for life skills development often stretches across multiple government agencies, policymakers may have limited exposure to and expertise in youth life skills. It may be beneficial, therefore, to assemble an independent working group to advise the government as it develops and rolls out a life skills policy. The group would ideally be composed of researchers, practitioners, representatives of multilateral agencies and donor organizations, and other experts with expertise in education, youth empowerment, and work force development experts. It could guide the needs assessment process described above, weigh in on the policy and its operational plan, and be a resource to policymakers as they troubleshoot any implementation challenges.

3. Cultivate life skills through the formal education system to provide continuous skill development at scale.

The formal education system offers a strong platform for life skills development. One key advantage is the ability to develop skills continuously alongside academic learning, building upon previously cultivated skills as youth graduate to higher grades. Youth can also be targeted at scale and across all ages. As a key first step in this direction, policymakers should identify promising programs in-country (implemented by NGOs) that seek to develop youth life skills by modifying academic instruction, and integrate elements of those programs that have been found effective into the life skills policy. These elements could include modification of examination content to motivate a focus on life skills among teachers and students, in-service training for teachers on how to cultivate life skills in the classroom, and in the long term, the integration of a life skills development focus into pre-service training.

4. Encourage schools that have robust extracurricular programming to offer additional mentor-led, club-based life skills activities.

Note that some countries have favored a standalone Life Skills course over embedding life skills development into core subject instruction. This has had mixed results, given (1) the course is not examinable and therefore not prioritized, (2) teachers often resort to "teaching" life skills instead of facilitating their acquisition, and (3) the course sometimes takes on a "values" rather than skills focus. That said, core academic instruction alone cannot develop all the life skills that youth need. It needs to be supplemented, if possible, by mentor-led extracurricular programming, which can help cultivate a host of personal strengths and interpersonal skills that are difficult to develop when teaching core subjects. The challenge is that such programming is difficult to roll out at scale—talented mentors are hard to find and teachers have limited time and incentive to train for and implement this role. However, if schools emphasize extracurriculars, and require teachers to devote some part of their time to running these activities, they could consider launching youth clubs that develop the full range of life skills. This might be an optional element of the life skills policy, to be implemented by schools if they have the needed set-up and capacity.

5. Conduct a phased roll-out embedded with rapid cycle testing—to ensure that the most effective iteration of the life skills policy is scaled.

Life skills are often new to not only policymakers, as mentioned above, but also to key staff running the day-to-day operations of relevant government agencies, who would ultimately be responsible for the roll-out of a life skills policy. Therefore, it is particularly vital in the realm of life skills to introduce a new policy in stages—to allow for a learning curve and for the educational system to transform as needed to adopt this new focus. If feasible, the government should embed in each phase a rapid-cycle evaluation—usually a mixed methods rigorous evaluation conducted over a few months. This will yield timely, actionable evidence on whether the policy is affecting the intended outcomes and shed light on what aspects of the policy may need to be reworked and how.

6. Operationalize a monitoring and support system.

Policymakers should put in place a robust monitoring system to track progress toward selected skill development goals and assess whether policies are being implemented as envisioned. This system can also ensure that implementers on the ground (such as teachers) receive the support they need as they implement key aspects of the policy. PSIPSE grantee EDC, for example, has recommended that the Rwandan Ministry of Education place master trainers at the district level to support teachers rolling out a new entrepreneurship curriculum. Qualitative insights from supervisors of this kind, as well as quantitative monitoring data tracking implementation progress, should be analyzed regularly to identify any challenges or risks.

7. ADVOCATE FOR PROGRAM SCALE-UP AT THE RIGHT TIME, USING THE RIGHT VOCABULARY AND RIGOROUS EVIDENCE. Life skills are gaining traction in the policy space in several PSIPSE focus countries. The time is particularly ripe for influencing policy in:

- **Uganda**, which is in the process of refining a new sexuality education framework that integrates life skills development. Curricular reform is also impending in 2020, which might be an apt time to help the government advance stalled efforts to train core subject teachers in learner-centered methods (another mechanism for developing life skills, as explained above).
- **Kenya**, which is also in the process of integrating life skills development into the core curriculum, which will be rolled out in secondary schools in 2022–2023.
- **Tanzania**, which is seeking to revitalize life skills education and is in the process of developing a life skills policy.
- **India**, which is developing an integrated health and life skills curriculum to be rolled out in priority districts.

PSIPSE grantees and other organizations have the opportunity to support the government in these policy and curricular efforts by sharing useful learning from their programs. They may also be in a strong position to promote program scale-up and adoption by government, depending on the individual government's priorities and vision for life skills development. PSIPSE grantee experiences yield a series of lessons about how to successfully advocate for scale. In particular, they highlight the importance of (1) using the right vocabulary to explain life skills and "make them real" for policymakers and (2) generating and sharing evidence of program effectiveness.

8. CAREFULLY STREAMLINE PROGRAM COMPONENTS FOR SCALE WHILE ENSURING THEY ARE NOT DILUTED.

Government officials taking on the responsibility for scaling an NGO's program typically have fewer staff hours available to devote to the program than NGOs do, and potentially have less expertise and experience in cultivating youth life skills. Therefore, as an NGO gears up to transition its life skills program to the government, it is vital that key program components—for example, training teachers and facilitators, offering ongoing support, and monitoring—be simplified and streamlined. At the same time, it is imperative not to oversimplify a program. Building life skills takes time and skilled facilitation, and discarding these elements wholesale could compromise program results. In streamlining life skills programs, NGOs would ideally identify the minimum program intensity and dosage needed to deliver impacts at scale.

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