

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a pink and white striped school shirt and a black lanyard, is smiling broadly. He is standing in front of a vibrant, colorful mural. The mural features abstract shapes in shades of blue, pink, green, and grey, with a prominent eye-like shape on the right side. In the top left corner, there is a dark green circular logo with the text 'DREAM a DREAM' in a stylized font.

DREAM  
a  
DREAM

**MAPPING LIFE SKILLS IN INDIA:  
RESEARCH, POLICY & PRACTICE**



Dream a Dream empowers young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast changing world, using a creative life skills approach.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dream a Dream is a registered, charitable trust empowering children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in the 21st century using a creative life skills approach. Currently, we work with 10,000 young people a year through two innovation labs – After School Life Skills Programme and Career Connect Programme. We have trained over 5500 teachers/educators from 157 partners impacting over 137,500 children and young people and have sensitized over 2500 volunteers through our unique Life Skills Development model. We work on a strong collaborative approach with local charities, corporates, volunteers, governments, expert consultants and a host of national and international strategic partners.

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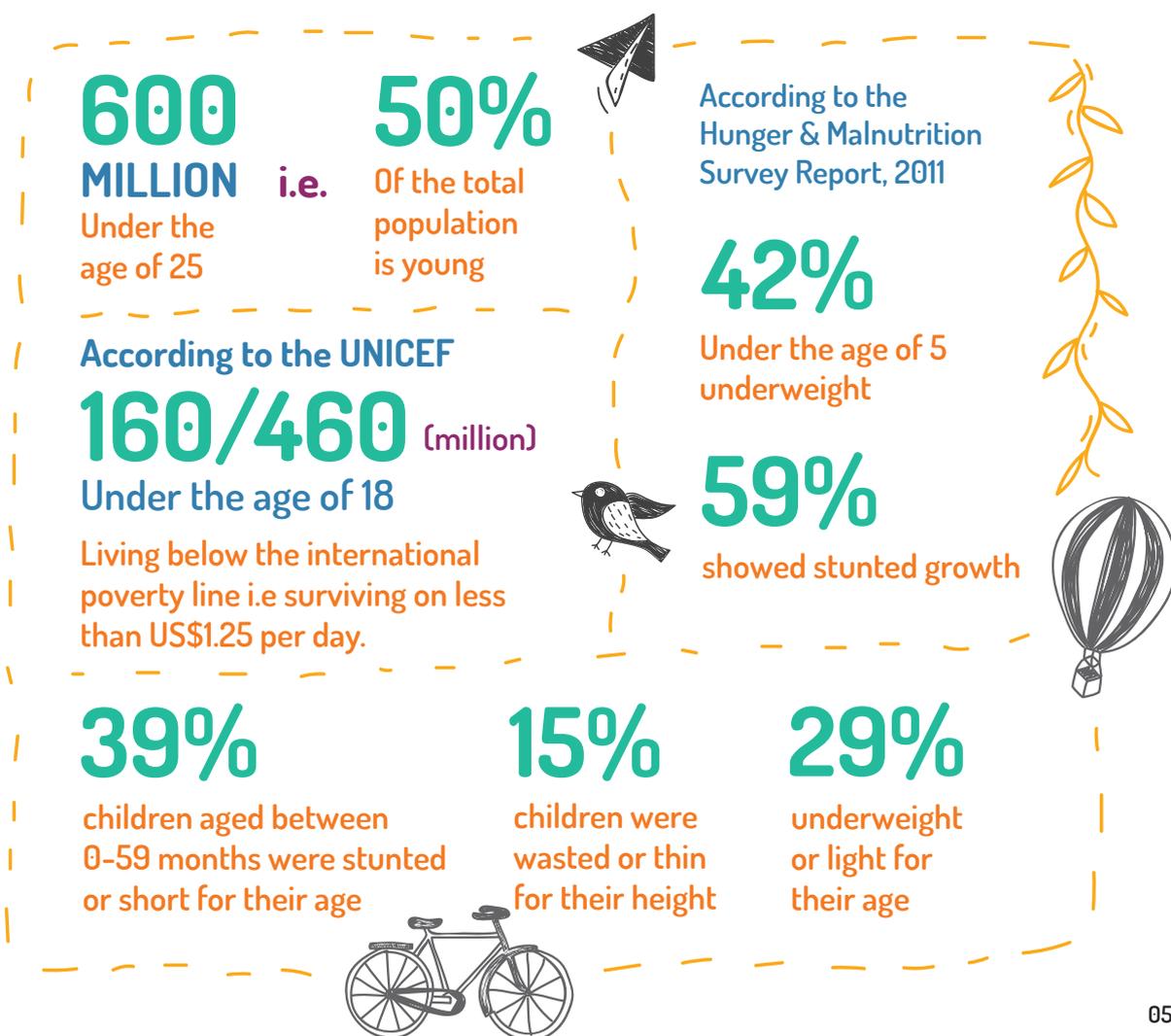
# ABSTRACT

In this report through a close reading of secondary sources that engage with life skills work in India, we explore both the strengths and the challenges in the sector today. More specifically, we bring together work in the areas of research, policy and implementation with a view to offering academics, policy makers and practitioners a ready and comprehensive guide to the work in the sector. Our intention is for this report to become the springboard for conversations and cross collaborative engagements across the three domains towards leveraging the importance of life skills in India.



# INTRODUCTION

India presently has the highest number of young people in the world yielding the country a rich demographic dividend; more specifically 600 million people under the age of 25 years, more than half of India's total population are youth (Jack, 2018). However, varied factors, like globalization, a changing economic landscape, sociocultural shifts, paucity of infrastructure in education along with adverse factors, including poverty and malnutrition, amongst others, has led to an environment of uncertainty and stress for many youth. More specifically, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF; 2009) reported that 160 million of the 460 million young people in India under 18 years old were living below the international poverty line, that is, were surviving on less than US\$1.25 per day. Furthermore, *the Hunger and Malnutrition (HUNGaMA) Survey Report 2011* (Naandi Foundation, 2012) stated that 42% of children aged under five years in India were underweight, and the growth of up to 59% was stunted. The Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC) that was conducted jointly by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and UNICEF in 2013-2014 found that among the children aged 0-59 months, 39 percent were stunted or short for their age, 15 percent were wasted or thin for their height and 29 percent were underweight or light for their age (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2013-2014).



These poor growth patterns that are a result of adversity, indicates developmental delay known as *failure to thrive* that are associated with a range of mental health and developmental issues resulting in challenges throughout life (Schwartz, 2000). Failure to thrive brings with it a host of problems; namely poorer cognitive abilities, poor information processing, emotion regulation difficulties, neuropsychological difficulties and behavioural problems such as self-harm and social withdrawal, amongst others (Kennedy, Pearson, Brett-Taylor, & Talreja, 2014).

It is in the context of both the opportunities that India's demographic dividend offers the country and the challenges of adversity that the youth face, that life skills assume critical importance. There is consensus in India in all three domains; namely, research, policy and implementation, of the importance of these skills to negotiate the fast-changing 21st century environment.

However, our observation from a comprehensive reading of secondary sources in the life skills domain in India, is that the varied challenges that children and youth face in the country have been accompanied by a missing articulation of adversity and its resultant failure to thrive such that the problem has been misunderstood. What we mean by this, is that the Indian policy vision for life skills stems from an emphasis on India's new economy and its growth; more specifically, skilling the employable demography such that the potential demographic dividend of the country yields results. Adversity is thus commonly approached as an unemployment problem with solutions envisioned in terms of creating more jobs, building skills for employability, and/or setting up vocational and/or remedial teaching institutions.

Furthermore, even while life skills education is important, its importance as we will see later in this report, is evaluated in terms of its contribution to making a person employable rather than being life ready. Hence, most critical perspectives on the nature and status of education, be it infrastructure capacities or policy visions on education, are from the point of view of education to meet the future economic needs of the country.

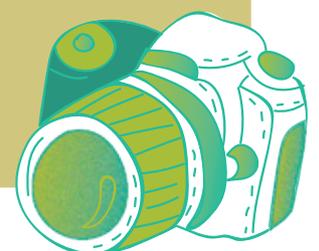
We reflect on this in the conclusion of this report, in the light of the specific context of India; what are the implications of articulating adversity primarily as un-employability rather than life readiness in a country where the nature of adversity is multifaceted manifesting itself as physical stunting, malnutrition, mental health, psychosocial and emotional issues in a significantly high percentage of children?



This report has been divided into four sections in which we examine:

- 1) **Section one: Conceptual Approaches to Life Skills**
- 2) **Section two: Life Skills Research and Measurement in India**
- 3) **Section three: Life Skills Policies in India**
- 4) **Section four: Life Skills Implementation in India**

In each section we reflect on the strengths and challenges within each domain and the implications thereof. Furthermore, in sections two through four, we examine a case study towards exploring international best practices in the respective domains and the insights they might offer for further work especially with reference to addressing the challenges faced. In the conclusion we present the opportunities and challenges we believe lie ahead of us in the life skills sector towards leveraging its importance in India through further study, policy and practice.





## SECTION ONE:

# Conceptual Approaches to Life Skills

The most widespread and commonly adopted definition of life skills is that of the WHO; they define life skills as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (World Health Organization, 1997, p.1). We present below in tabular form some of the varied ways in which life skills has been detailed:<sup>1</sup>

### WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Decision making  
Problem-solving  
Creative thinking  
Critical thinking  
Communication  
Interpersonal skills  
Self-awareness  
Empathy  
Coping with emotions  
Coping with stress

### PARTNERSHIP FOR 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

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Learning Skills	Literacy Skills	Life Skills
Critical thinking	Information literacy	Flexibility
Creative thinking	Media literacy	Initiative
Collaborating	Technology literacy	Social skills
Communicating		Productivity
		Leadership

## HILTON PELLIGRINO

Cognitive Competencies	Intra-Personal Competencies	Inter-Personal Competencies
Cognitive processes	Work ethic	Teamwork and collaboration
Knowledge	Positive self-evaluation	Leadership
Creativity and Innovation	Intellectual openness	

## DeSeCo - DEFINITION & SELECTION OF COMPETENCIES (OECD - ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT)

Using Tools Interactively	Interacting in Homogeneous Groups	Acting Autonomously
The ability to use language, symbols and text interactively	The ability to relate to others well	The ability to act within the big picture
The ability to use knowledge and information interactively	The ability to cooperate	The ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects
The ability to use technology interactively	The ability to manage and resolve conflicts	



## WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Foundational Literacies	Competencies	Character Qualities
Literacy	Critical thinking, Problem solving	Curiosity
Numeracy	Creativity	Initiative
Scientific literacy	Communication	Persistence
ICT literacy	Collaboration	Adaptability
Financial literacy		Leadership
Cultural and Civic literacy		Social and Cultural awareness

## COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING (CASEL)

Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Responsible decision making:
Accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths	Regulating one's emotions to handle stress, and controlling impulses	Being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others	Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships, resisting inappropriate social pressure, resolving conflict	Making decisions, respect for others, applying decision making skills to academic and social situations

On closer examination of the tables above one observes descriptions of overlapping competencies, however, clustered differently (Bapna, Sharma, Kaushik, & Kumar, 2017, p.1).<sup>2</sup> So, for example, critical thinking falls under learning skills in the Partnership for 21st Century framework and under competencies in the World Economic Forum framework. Furthermore, each skill set comprises a complex set of sub-skills that cannot be easily disaggregated;

for example, creativity and curiosity are mentioned as separate skills in the World Economic Forum framework, while the literature identifies curiosity to be an integral part of creativity (Bapna, Sharma, Kaushik, & Kumar, 2017). In addition to the multiple ways in which life skills are described and grouped as skill sets, the very terminology life skills is associated with other terminologies, namely, non-cognitive skills, non-academic skills, social skills, 21st century skills, soft skills, social and emotional learning (SEL), vocational and/or employability skills, amongst others.

The multiple conceptual approaches to describing life skills, in addition to varied terminologies associated with it, has led to an ambiguity in understanding and articulating the exact nature of these skills and competencies. This in turn has led to challenges in areas of cross collaborative discussions, development of methods to measure life skills and in the design of interventions to develop those skills (Bapna, Sharma, Kaushik, & Kumar, 2017).



<sup>1</sup>We draw from two different sources. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) definition and categorisation of life skills has been sourced from Central Square Foundation's (2015) background note, namely, *Life Skills Education in India: An Overview of Evidence and Current Practices*. The other four definitions and categorisations have been sourced from Evaldesign's (2017) handbook, namely, *Measuring 21st Century Skills*. [http://www.evaldesign.com/uploads/2/3/8/2/23823775/evaldesign\\_handbook\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.evaldesign.com/uploads/2/3/8/2/23823775/evaldesign_handbook_final_web.pdf) (accessed on 1/8/2018).

<sup>2</sup>In their handbook, *Measuring 21st Century Skills*, Bapna, Sharma, Kaushik, & Kumar (2017) offer cogent insights into the implications of the varied conceptual approaches to life skills. We draw on their insights.



## SECTION TWO:

# Life Skills in India: Research & Measurement

There is growing interdisciplinary research evidence in India that life skills are associated with positive outcomes. Broadly this research on life skills can be divided into two areas: life skills in education and towards employability.

Studies demonstrate the importance of non-cognitive skills in school performance and learning outcomes (Farnham, Fernando, Perigo, Brosman, & Tough, 2015). Researchers, for example, have demonstrated through experiments with a control and treatment group that life skills based teaching content improve academic learning outcomes in high school students in India between the ages of 13 and 15 years (Subasree, 2015). These life skills programs attempt to build self-awareness, empathy, communication, emotional understanding, stress management, rational and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, and relationship skills, through processes like group activities, games, role play, and lectures amongst others. Furthermore, studies reveal that students equipped with 21st century skills, like strong interpersonal skills for communication and collaboration, creativity and intellectual flexibility, self-sufficiency, and the ability to learn new things when necessary; transition from childhood to adulthood in a healthy manner and are empowered to meet the demands and stresses of a fast-changing environment (Vranda & Rao, 2011; Rust, 2013; Kumar & Chhabra, 2014).

More specifically, studies demonstrate the link between positive mental health outcomes and curricular performance in public and private schools (Miller, 2014). That is, research reveals that life skills programs are effective psychosocial intervention strategies that not only help curb risky adolescent behaviour but also promote better learning outcomes amongst them (Bardhan & Nair, 2016). Mental health professionals believe life skills training programs effectively address adolescent issues such as alcohol and substance use, reproductive and sexual health, criminal acts, HIV/AIDS prevention and suicide prevention (Pillai, 2012). More significantly, research reveals these training programs go beyond mitigating negative behaviours and lead to significant improvement in self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and empathy (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009; Rani & Singh, 2015). Hence researchers recommend life skills education as a part of curricular learning (Prajapati, Sharma & Sharma, 2017). In recognition of the importance of life skills education, the CBSE has called for the inclusion of life skills in the school curriculum across India (Behrani, 2016).

Studies also demonstrate the importance of life skills education for girls, both rural and urban, and life skills training for teachers from secondary school onwards recognizing their importance in children's lives and the importance of skills in improving their relationship with children and their teaching orientation (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014; Kumari, 2014). Studies with a focus on life skills education for girls find that through such education, girls can improve their coping skills, problem solving abilities, take positive actions like speaking up about

gender violence, and seek help from the appropriate channels (Pujar, Hunshal, & Bailur, 2014). The Government of India in an attempt to scale life skills education for adolescent girls pioneered the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), now discontinued, whose strength was its emphasis on health and nutrition, counselling and vocational training.<sup>1</sup>

Studies with a focus on employability reveal that soft skills enhance employability directly as well as via their indirect impact on professional trainability; more specifically, these studies have been done in the fields of engineering, management, IT, and a host of other sectors, (Blom & Saeki, 2011). Soft skills, these scholars argue shape an individual's persona, boost communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving skills, amongst others that are crucial for productivity today (Padmini, 2012; Vyas & Chauhan, 2013; Kumar & Kumar, 2016). Talreja (2017) distinguishes between life skills and soft skills; life skills, he argues, are core foundational skills without which a person cannot overcome adversity and be life ready, of which career preparedness is a part. The World Bank too argues in favour of the possession of generic skills needed to learn and adapt to different tasks and problem-solving environments, especially in dynamic economic environments for success (World Bank, 2012).

Research has also addressed the challenges with respect to implementing life skills education and skills for employability. With respect to the former the challenges are traced to various factors; namely, the continuing perception that cognitive skills and academic outcomes are more important in the domain of education than non-cognitive skills, challenges with funding, lack of trainers, and/or institutional access to life skills learning, amongst others (Suresh & Subramoniam, 2015; Singh & Sharma, 2016). Studies trace challenges with achieving employability targets in India to problems within the education sector; namely, infrastructure and capacity issues and the approach to education itself (Goswami, 2013). Winthrop & McGivney (2015) argue that there must be a fundamental rethinking in developing countries on the approach to education, given the huge gulf in average levels of education between rich and poor countries. Without this rethinking, they argue, it will take the children in developing countries 100 years to reach the education levels achieved in developed countries. Intel (2012) in an education brief traces the challenge for employability in India to poor quality education on account of weak infrastructure and inadequate pedagogic attention, and recommends a focus on high quality education that encompasses life skills education that equips a person with the new nature of skills required in India's new economy. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) report on Indian education policy noting India's enormous human capital potential emphasizes the need to develop and adopt a coherent approach with respect to designing and implementing policies with a focus on improving the quality of education and its learning outcomes in order to meet the needs of an innovation-driven economy (OECD, 2014). What these studies and reports suggest is that the challenges to achieving India's employability targets need to be traced to problems with the quality of education in India and recommend life skills education as a method to address this problem.

# MEASURING LIFE SKILLS

Complementing the research on life skills in India have been varied efforts over the past decade to measure those skills and its outcomes. Life skills intervention outcomes are measured through a temporal lens; more specifically, immediately post a life skills program, in the short-term, and in the long-term; the latter referred to as the life outcome of the life skills intervention. We present here some of the measurement tools along this temporal dimension.



## A: Immediate and Short-Term Impact

Two life skills assessment scales in India assess life skills as a whole; both were developed in the context of a lack of standardized measurement tools to measure the impact of life skills programs and/or interventions:

### 1. The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD)

The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), which is now discontinued, was designated as an institution of national importance in 2012. As part of their M.A. program in life skills education, the syllabus of which encompassed research papers, materials, and modules for training like the training-of-trainer (ToT); they developed a comprehensive normalized Life Skills Assessment Scale that has been subsequently adopted by a number of researchers (Subasree & Nair, 2014). The scale rooted in a comprehensive consideration of clinical psychology literature is based on the ten core life skills identified by the WHO with approximately ten indicators per skill, totalling 100. More specifically:

Sl. No.	Dimensions of Life Skills	Number of Items
1	Self-Awareness	11
2	Empathy	11
3	Effective Communication	09
4	Interpersonal Relationships	11
5	Creative Thinking	08
6	Critical Thinking	11
7	Decision Making	11
8	Problem Solving	09
9	Coping with Emotions	11
10	Coping with Stress	08

The perceived strengths of this scale are that it is a self-rating diagnostic to evaluate the impact of a training program and lends itself for training purposes. The shortcomings are associated with its length and the subsequent time required administering it.

## 2. The Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale (DLSAS)

The DLSAS is a simple 5-item impact assessment scale that was developed using observational data of 1,135 disadvantaged children aged 8 to 16 years (Kennedy, Pearson, Brett-Taylor, & Talreja, 2014). The context for the development of this scale was the observation that several programs, more specifically non-governmental organizations in India, work with disadvantaged children coming from backgrounds of adversity and have no simple and effective tool to measure their program interventions. The authors of this measurement tool believe this scale is culture free and child centred and can hence be used globally to measure life skills of disadvantaged children. The tool involves teachers or facilitators measuring five critical life skills based on observation, namely: interacting with others, overcoming difficulties and solving problems, taking initiative, managing conflict, and understanding and following instructions. This scale is currently being used in 26 countries.

## 3. Life Skills Scales Being Developed:

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Room to Read have collaborated to create a new life skills assessment tool that the latter have piloted in South Asia, Africa and South-East Asia (Kwauk, Heyman, & Care, 2016). As part of the creation of this tool they pilot-tested a wide range of measurement approaches—from simple self-reporting questions to more activity-based tasks. Topics covered in the questionnaire range from self-esteem to critical thinking and self-awareness.<sup>2</sup>

## 4. Evaldesign's Approach to Evaluation

Some of the other approaches to measuring life skills program interventions are seen in Evaldesign's approach to evaluation. The pre-pilot phase involves a literature review to align research questions with instrument development and field visits to understand the context of the evaluation. The pilot phase involves the refinement of the instruments developed in the pre-pilot phase through qualitative feedback from stakeholders. The second phase of refinement involves a statistical validation in the case of quantitative studies (Bapna, Sharma, Kaushik, & Kumar, 2017). Some of the work Evaldesign has done for organizations is as follows:

- a. **Design for Change:** They use the Feel-Imagine-Do-Share (FIDS) framework of design thinking to foster agency and a community spirit through school children. The program skills evaluated were Leadership, Creativity, Problem Solving/Critical Thinking and Empathy.
- b. **Going to School:** They teach entrepreneurship skills in schools using storytelling, projects and games. The skills measured to evaluate program impact were Creative Problem Solving, Creativity, Gender Attitudes and Business Skills.

This approach means the utilization of measurement tools/scales, predominantly international, to measure different facets of life skills, that is, self-esteem, confidence, creativity, perseverance rather than life skills comprehensively.

## 5. Scholastic Assessments of Children

Another approach to measuring short term outcomes of life skills programs are through scholastic assessments of children while they are still in school, post the completion of life skills programs. Some of the organizations that conduct school assessments are Educational Initiatives (EI) and Gray Matters.<sup>3</sup>

### B. Long-Term Outcome

Studies reveal that life outcomes of life skills interventions are challenging to assess primarily on account of a lack of consensus of what to measure; that is, what constitutes a life outcome and how to measure a life outcome; for example, some scholars view quality of life outcomes through a purely subjective lens while others approach it as material well-being (Ravens-Sieberer, Karow, Barthel, Klasen, 2014). The most popular measurement tool to measure a person's quality of life and used by researchers and practitioners in India, is the one developed by the WHO for their mental health program, namely, the WHOQOL-100. The challenge with this scale, however, is that most items on the scale are anchored in the mental health space and not representative of different facets of life (World Health Organisation, 1998).

## Net Takeaway: Research and Measurement of Life Skills in India

The nature of research on life skills in India is to a large part in the domains of education outcomes and employability. More specifically, research in the domain of education reveals that life skills education improves the child's psychosocial abilities which in turn improve learning outcomes. Much research has been done especially in positive mental health outcomes of these programs with adolescents, which becomes the stepping stone to better learning outcomes. Research on positive outcomes for girls, specifically in equipping them to negotiate the gender requirements of life around them, and the advantages of life skills training for teachers, are some of the other important areas of inquiry.

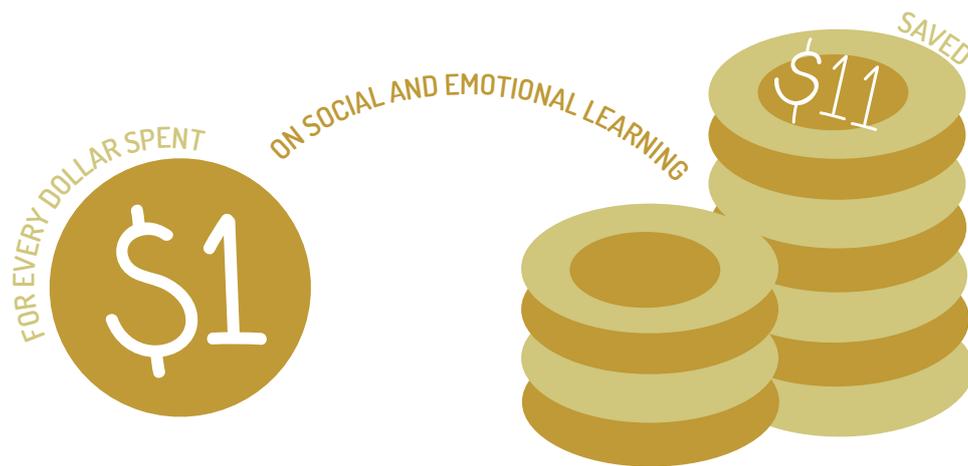
The research on the advantages of life skills training for employability, details improvement both in personality scores towards employment and in the chances of employability itself. The challenges with reaching employability targets are, as seen, linked to a critique of the quality and status of education in India. What this means is that despite the different ways in which advantages of life skills education is being researched in India, life skills education is evaluated through the lens of employment readiness rather than life readiness. This in our mind runs the danger of being reductionist and articulating adversity solely through the lens of employability.

Some studies reveal that life skills acquisition from the early formative childhood years have a strong influence on a person's long-term trajectory (Helmers & Patnam, 2008). However, as seen above, research studies that focus on early childhood years are few; the emphasis of research in India is education and employability. The missing articulation of adversity as deprivation caused by multiple factors that causes physical stunting and mental health development issues from childhood onwards, in our mind, leads to the risk of seeing solutions anchored in only part of the problem. Research that looks at the role of life skills education from the early formative years moving forward to school years and then adolescent and young adult lives in the context of adversity and its resultant failure to thrive, rather than looking at the problem or challenge as one of employability alone and solution as skilling for job creation, is a challenge the sector in India must address.

Another challenge in our mind is one of measurement; the multiplicity of measurement tools that in the large part measure facets of life skills and not life skills as a whole arises from both the multiple ways in which life skills are defined and skill sets detailed, and from the challenge of measuring long term outcomes of life skills interventions. The latter challenge stems from the difficulty of defining what a life outcome is; that is, what constitutes a good quality of life. The development of a simple standardized life skills measurement tool, that is, the DLSAS for the age group 8-16 provides the opportunity for cross collaborative dialogue on the impact of different life skills interventions. More focus is required to develop standardized tools that measure life skills as a whole that can be utilized across the age groups, and address the assessment of outcomes across the temporal spectrum, that is, immediate outcomes to long term outcomes. We do acknowledge that there might be other tools available across India used by different organizations to measure Life Skills and we hope this report can encourage more organizations to share their tools and their own journey of measurement with the larger sector.

We examine **CASEL's (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)** approach to research on Social Emotional Learning (SEL), with the challenges that research on life skills in India faces in mind.<sup>4</sup>





### *Social Emotional Learning 1 to 11-dollar return*

CASEL has spearheaded research on SEL in the United States for the past 20 years, towards leveraging its importance at the national level through conducting original research and curating and spotlighting research of collaborators. More specifically, CASEL approaches research and implementation collaboratively and builds on feedback from students, teachers, districts, policymakers, and experts in the field. CASEL approaches SEL research through a multidisciplinary lens with the understanding that the needs of students who aspire to succeed are constantly changing, and with a view of assessing the long-term impact of SEL programs in a student's life. They thus come up with new research studies in order to respond and capture the changes in students and the ecosystem by drawing upon research from varied fields; namely, neuroscience, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, and economics, amongst others. In addition, CASEL has studied assessments, data and metrics in the area of SEL towards facilitating informed decision making, development of strategies and programming in the sector. They are also creating an assessment guide to help educators differentiate between different assessment tools and choose the appropriate measure.

One of the major studies CASEL conducted over a six year period beginning 2011, to assess long term impact of SEL, involved an evaluation of 213 social and emotional learning programs; this study provides evidence that students exposed to SEL in education demonstrate an average of 13-percentile increase compared to those who do not (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The research demonstrates that SEL programming significantly improves children's academic performance on standardized tests; furthermore compared to control groups children who participate in SEL programs, like school, perform better in school, have significantly better school attendance records, are less disruptive in the classroom, and are less likely to be suspended or otherwise disciplined.

CASEL created the Collaborating District Initiative in 2011. Along with the partnership of American Institutes for Research and eight large and diverse school districts across the USA, CASEL set out to develop the capacities of districts to plan, implement, monitor, and

document systemic changes that would impact schools and classrooms in ways that would enhance students' social-emotional development and academic performance in order to inform future efforts to support systemic SEL implementation in districts across the country. In addition CASEL has published resource guides for educators titled *2013 CASEL Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs Guide- Preschool and Elementary* and *2015 CASEL Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs Guide Middle school and High School* that enable effective implementation of SEL in the classroom. The CASEL Resource Library is also a source for current research; reports are updated and archived and furthermore contributions from researchers, district partners and other collaborators are sought.

The outcome of CASEL's approach is that districts across the USA are making social and emotional learning (SEL) central to the educational process with resultant positive impact. School leaders are creating safe and supportive learning environments. Teachers are creating classrooms where students are engaged, respected, empowered, and where they succeed academically. Academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance are up; students and staff are more positive and suspensions and disciplinary incidents are down.

The CASEL case study, we believe, offers important insights into how better to leverage the importance of life skills in India especially keeping in mind the work The Indian Association of Life Skills Education (IALSE)<sup>5</sup> is doing to leverage the importance of life skills in the country. IALSE curates life skills literature in India, publishes a journal called the International Journal of Life Skills Education, and hosts international conferences on life skills education with a view to bringing together researchers and practitioners working on life skills into dialogue. CASEL's collaborative approach with a specific focus on multidisciplinary and long-term research on SEL, its measurement and institutional work in bringing together different stakeholders towards making SEL central to school systems, has helped make SEL part of the education vision in the United States. In India too, IALSE or any other institutional research effort, in our mind, would need to be collaborative and bring into the foreground the need to articulate adversity and its resultant failure to thrive, such that life skills work becomes a solution from childhood through to young adult life; with outcomes thought of as preparedness to face life holistically and not through the prism of employability alone.

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<sup>1</sup>Information sourced from <http://www.nmew.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&sublinkid=111&lid=138&level=1&domid=6&ltypeid=1> (accessed on 1/8/2018)

<sup>2</sup>More detailed information can be found at <http://www.roomtoread.org/the-latest/room-to-read-creates-an-innovative-tool-to-measure-girls-life-skills> (accessed on 5/6/2018)

<sup>3</sup>Details of their work can be sourced from <https://www.ei-india.com/about/> (accessed on 5/6/2018) and <http://www.graymatters.in> (accessed on 5/6/2018) respectively. (accessed on 5/6/2018)

<sup>4</sup>In this section we have drawn information from <http://www.casel.org/impact> (accessed on 5/6/2018) <sup>5</sup> More information on IALSE can be sourced from <http://ialseconference2018.org/>

<sup>5</sup> More information on IALSE can be sourced from <http://ialseconference2018.org/> (accessed on 5/6/2018).

# SMILE

CHILDREN MAGAZINE



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## **SECTION THREE:**

# **Life Skills Policies in India**

The policy focus on life skills in India is broadly in the domains of education which encompasses life skills education for students and training for teachers and skilling towards employment. We start with examining closely the policy vision in the domain of education.

## **A. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)**

The NCERT published the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which was updated and republished in 2005 (NCERT, 2005). This document outlines recommendations and influences curriculum designs across Central Board schools in both rural and urban areas; in addition it contains references to life skills. We examine various position papers related to the NCERT with a view to make sense of the broad contours of how life skills education has been envisioned through policy:

### **1. Education for Peace**

The Education for Peace position paper makes an argument that education should not only seek to increase learning outcomes but also emphasize factors such as peace and well-being (NCERT, 2006). Education for peace is about the latter shaping the vision for education rather than becoming a subject to study. Furthermore, the paper considers the role of the teacher in the context of mentorship and highlights their importance as role models of values such as the art of listening, the humility to acknowledge and correct one's mistakes, assuming responsibility for one's actions, sharing concerns, and helping each other to solve problems transcending differences.

### **2. Health and Physical Education**

The position paper highlights a health and physical education curriculum for life skills building for both teachers and students (NCERT, 2016). The life skills for students being (a) critical thinking (b) interpersonal communications skills and (c) negotiation skills while for teachers (a) communication skills (b) skills for being non-judgemental and (c) skills for having empathy. The paper identifies various NGOs as case studies to be studied with a view to imbibe learnings from them into the national curricula.

### **3. Adolescence Education Program**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), in a joint effort with NCERT and United Nations Population Fund, and guided by the principles of NCF 2005, have come up with the Adolescence Education Program (AEP).<sup>1</sup> The modules and experiential training materials emphasize life skills and include training for teachers to facilitate the program.

This five-day program is meant for adolescents in grades IX to XII and in future those of grades I to VIII, and envisions empowering them with age appropriate and culturally relevant skills to respond to real life situations in positive and responsible ways. The program emphasis is largely on health, with HIV and substance abuse being some of the areas covered. Research, however, so far is not conclusive about the efficacy of the program; furthermore, there is little data available indicating enrolment levels considered in the AEP.

## **B. Government-Sponsored Teacher Training Programs**

Complementing the focus on life skills education in school curriculum is the focus on training teachers in skills. Policy efforts with a focus on life skills teacher training programs are as follows:

### **1. YUVA School Life Skills Program**

The YUVA program in Delhi envisions providing learning to children in Delhi that would make them happy, responsible, healthy and productive citizens through empowering teachers, by affirming and validating them through primarily human resources inputs and the provision of enabling resources and a caring environment.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the empowerment of teachers is meant to have them feel valued and have a sense of self-worth in order for them to reach their full potential and stated goals. Towards this the Delhi government has conducted the program with 40,000 teachers on a trial basis and is looking to expand. Research on this program is awaited.

### **2. Public-Private Teacher Training**

The Central Board of Secondary Education first commissioned the PC Training Institute (PCTI) group in 2012, a private enterprise, to do mini-teacher training programs which was extended to the following year too; a variety of topics were covered, namely, life skills, health and wellness, value education, and gender sensitivity, amongst others. The PCTI ran small life skills training workshops for students as well.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Toolkits**

Government bodies have written varied curricula recommendations and developed toolkits that focus on teacher training. For example, the NCERT has written a teacher suggestion packet (NCERT, 2016) while the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has developed teacher manuals on life skills.<sup>4</sup> They include a theoretical background for the importance of life skills in the classroom and suggestions for activities.

## C. National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

The national policy to address skill development and entrepreneurship was formulated in 2015 building upon the former 2009 National Policy on Skill Development (NPSD).<sup>5</sup> The vision of the policy is “to create an ecosystem of empowerment by skilling on a large scale at speed with high standards and to promote a culture of innovation based entrepreneurship which can generate wealth and employment to ensure sustainable livelihoods for all citizens in the country.” The policy has two components; namely skilling and entrepreneurship with the specific aim of furthering an entrepreneurial culture in the country through advocacy and the integration of entrepreneurship education as part of formal/skill education within the broader education system. Further, the intended approach is collaborative; more specifically that skills development is the shared responsibility of key stakeholders, namely, government, the corporate sector, community based organizations, individuals working in the skilling and entrepreneurship space, industry and trade organizations, amongst others.

The context behind the formulation of this policy as mentioned in the policy itself is that 62% of India’s population is in the working age group 15 to 59 with 54% of the population below 25 years of age. What that means is that over the next decade the population pyramid is expected to bulge across the 15 to 59 age group of which many youth are unemployed.

With respect to skill development in the country some of the challenges identified by the policy is as follows; non-integration with formal education, lack of focus on outcomes, focus on numbers rather than quality of training infrastructure and trainers, vocational training programs not aligned to the requirements of the industry, 93% of the workforce in the informal/unorganized sector, and only 4.69% of the total workforce in India having undergone formal skill training as compared to 68% in UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has identified many organizations that focus on different facets of skill development to meet these challenges. Some of the measures being taken are as follows: integrating skilling with schools above 9th grade onwards to make it aspirational, creating capacity for skilling through private institutes, government institutes, ITIs and Polytechnics and overseeing quality. They launched the **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)** in 2013, for example, as a competency-based framework that organizes qualifications according to levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude graded from one to ten.<sup>6</sup> These learning outcomes encompass all methods of learning be it formal, non-formal or informal learning, thereby standardizing qualifications and lending dignity to those from the informal sector too.

**The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** was set up as a public private partnership company in 2009 with a specific objective to “contribute significantly to the overall target of skilling up of people in India, mainly by fostering private sector initiatives in skill development programs and to provide funding.”<sup>7</sup> More specifically the objectives are to:

- Upgrade skills to international standards through significant industry involvement and develop necessary frameworks for standards, curriculum and quality assurance
- Enhance, support and co-ordinate private sector initiatives for skill development through appropriate Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models; strive for significant operational and financial involvement from the private sector
- Play the role of a “market-maker” by bringing financing, particularly in sectors where market mechanisms are ineffective or missing
- Prioritize initiatives that can have a multiplier or catalytic effect as opposed to one-off impact.

Through partnerships with the private sector they aim to create awareness and capacity, through partnerships with universities and school systems they aim to vocationalise education and through partnerships with non-profit organizations they aim to build capacities with marginalized groups and develop livelihood, self-employment and entrepreneurship programs.

## Net Takeaway: Life Skills Policies in India

A key observation in this section is that there is much emphasis to skills in India’s policy vision. In the education sphere the focus is on developing life skills through physical education and health awareness and training teachers in life skills. The policy on skill development is detailed and one facet of it is developing awareness and skills for vocations from high school onwards. The policy emphasis on skills per se, however, is geared towards employability; that is, while there is some attention on life skills education, the policy vision and funding is focused on skilling the youth towards taking advantage of its demographic dividend. Towards that more attention is paid to developing vocational skills amongst high school students than developing life skills from a younger age towards life readiness. The exception is the Delhi government which is allocating funds towards the development of life skills towards empowering their students to lead holistic productive lives as citizens. This focus on employability, that we discussed in section two of this report as well, stems in our mind from a missing articulation of adversity as is witnessed in our country with 59 percent of the children stunted. This articulation of the problem as one of job creation results in a policy vision that seeks solutions through vocational skilling.

It is in this context that we examine **Singapore as a case study** to reflect on how the focus on life skills education facilitated the improvement in their economy. Singapore has witnessed incredible growth and prosperity in just a few decades stemming significantly from its policies on education and is ranked second in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Rank, and sixth on the Global Innovation Index.<sup>8</sup> Singapore has seen a significant shift from low literacy rates to scoring well above OECD averages in maths, reading, and science.

Researchers have acknowledged the education model that uses play and other creative methods to promote holistic learning that goes beyond classic notions of the classroom, builds 21st century skills, and promotes preparedness for the modern economy (Lee, Hong,

Niemi, 2014). Life skills are endorsed by students and stakeholders as important for building resilience, persistence, and confidence, amongst others that facilitate facing 21st century life's possibilities and challenges.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Education of Singapore in 2014 endorsed the spirit of the Learning for Life Program (LLP); this is reflected in the Minister of Education, Heng Swee Keat's pronouncement that education is meant to help students "grow richer in spirit and purpose."<sup>10</sup> The LLP includes Community & Youth Leadership, Music & Performing Arts, Visual Arts & Design and Sports and Outdoor Education offered in many schools with a focus to build teamwork, values, and life skills.<sup>11</sup> The leadership program identifies three levels of leadership, skillsets at each level, and tangible training and development plans encompassing workshops, camps, and community projects to instil the skills. The desired outcomes of this education approach are student excellence in life skills, knowledge skills and subject discipline knowledge; more specifically organized into eight core skills and values, namely character development, self-management skills, social and cooperative skills, literacy and numeracy, communication skills, information skills, thinking skills, creativity and knowledge application skills.

Singapore's Ministry of Education also emphasizes the importance of applied learning and have various programs including the Applied Learning Program (ALP) in both primary and secondary schools. These programs emphasize the relevance of learning to current and future industry needs, provide hands on experiential training, equip the students with skills to engage in the practical application of knowledge and partner with industry, community, institutions of higher learning, and/or professional training bodies.<sup>12</sup>

The emphasis in Singapore has been on education and more specifically life skills education; within the broader focus on this approach to education is applied learning towards meeting industry and economy needs. This approach to education towards helping students "grow richer in spirit and purpose" is what sets Singapore apart, from our perspective, from the policy vision in India. We are not suggesting that India emulate Singapore; our suggestion is that a focus on employment as problem and solution as is the case with India's current policy vision does not address the problem of adversity as it exists today. More specifically the complexity of adversity in our mind requires a focus on a holistic form of education with an emphasis on life skills for life preparedness. This approach in our mind would better address the opportunity the country's demographic dividend offers.

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<sup>1</sup>Information about this program can be sourced from [http://mhrd.gov.in/adolescence\\_programme](http://mhrd.gov.in/adolescence_programme) (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>2</sup>Information about this program can be sourced from [http://www.edudel.nic.in/yuva/Yuva\\_Preview.htm](http://www.edudel.nic.in/yuva/Yuva_Preview.htm) (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>3</sup>Information can be sourced from <http://www.pctigroup.com/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>4</sup>These manuals can be downloaded from <https://cbseportal.com/download/text-books/teachers-manual-life-skills-class-ix-x> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>5</sup>Information can be sourced from <http://www.skilldevelopment.gov.in/National-Policy-2015.html> (accessed 7/6/2018)

<sup>6</sup>Information can be sourced from <https://www.nsda.gov.in/nsqf.html> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>7</sup>Information can be sourced from <https://www.msde.gov.in/nationalskilldevelopmentcorporation.html> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>8</sup>Information can be obtained from <http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/singapore-overview-2/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>9</sup>Everyday Responsibilities at Xinmin Primary School. YouTube, 13 Oct. 2016. This video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vG-r8Ugw9QU> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>10</sup>Beyond Learning for Work, to Learning for Life. YouTube, 6 Mar. 2015. This video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPVlq7KKXSY> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>11</sup>Information can be sourced from <http://christchurchsec.moe.edu.sg/our-curriculum/learning-for-life-programme> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>12</sup>Information can be accessed at <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/all-primary-schools-to-offer-hands-on-learning-by-2023> (accessed on 2/8/2018).



POWERED  
BY DREAMS

## SECTION FOUR:

# Implementation–Building Life Skills in India

There are many non-governmental organizations in India working towards providing life skills training to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They do so through varied approaches. Here we examine a fraction of these efforts with a view to gesturing to the breadth and depth of work and the broader vision that guides these efforts. While this is not a comprehensive list, it opens opportunities of dialogue and collaboration and tells us that a lot of good work is happening in life skills across India.

## A. Life Skills Programs

### 1. Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation:

Learning Curve runs a life skills development program that enables children from marginalised backgrounds to be psychologically, emotionally and socially healthy stemming from a belief in emotional and social development. That is, more than academics, the children they believe, need help with their overall self-esteem, identity, expression, self-confidence and the opportunity to realize their potential.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. VOICE4Girls: Her VOICE:

Her VOICE works with underprivileged girls between the ages of 11 and 16 (who number 72 million in India) who are enrolled in low-end private schools and residential schools in India towards developing their awareness and their inner strength through camps with a life skills approach. More specifically the life skills they cover are interpersonal skills, leadership skills, problem solving, skills for independence and critical thinking, knowledge of basic health, safety, rights, self-awareness, future planning and spoken English to articulate thoughts and ideas.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Mentor Together:

Mentor Together mentors young people of age 13-21 from disadvantaged backgrounds through life skills exercises in Bangalore, Pune, Mysore and Chennai. The organisation offers avenues for authentic companionship between mentors and mentees to change attitudes in the latter; more specifically, attitude to learning English, overcome fear of public speaking and examinations, planning better, and in some cases thwarting early-marriage pressures, amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. Diksha Foundation:

Diksha Foundation works with children and youngsters of economically disadvantaged communities through a life skills approach to raise their awareness of their responsibility toward their life as citizens and create better futures for themselves, their families, and the

larger community. It has two Knowledge Hubs of Education and Learning (KHEL) centres in Patna and Hilsa for this purpose.<sup>4</sup>

## **5. Apni Shala Foundation:**

The Apni Shala Foundation provides life skills education programs to schools and non-profit organisations that wish to focus on social, emotional and cognitive development of children such that they are better equipped to deal with their day to day challenges, making friends, maintaining healthy relationships, and reflecting on their actions, amongst other choices. The programs for children and teachers are tied together by two main aspects, namely, experience and expression. Experiences are provided through hands-on projects, drama and games while expression is developed through structured reflection sessions that create a platform for participants to question, brainstorm, and express themselves in an environment free of judgement. Their program for teachers, Kick Start Life Skills, helps teachers design their own life skills education programs for children and gives them the know-how of delivering such programs in simple ways in their everyday classroom.<sup>5</sup>

## **B. Life Skills Development through Sport**

### **1. Just for Kicks:**

Just for Kicks works with Indian schools that cater to underprivileged children belonging to government schools, low-cost private schools and public-private partnership schools. The organisation provides football training as a part of the school curriculum to both boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 16 years towards developing life skills.<sup>6</sup>

### **2. Magic Bus: Sports for Development Program:**

Magic Bus's Childhood to Livelihood approach enables children and young people move out of poverty by completing secondary education and getting a stable job. They equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to grow up and move out of poverty.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Magic Bus in conjunction with Centre for Education Innovations, engages children and youth from ages 8 to 18 years from slums. They impart knowledge in health, education, gender, and leadership through a sports-based life skills program. Conducted by trained local youth volunteers above 17 years of age, the program with a 120-hour curriculum conducted weekly over a period of three years strives to bring about behavioural change through numerous games and activities. To garner the support of the community, meetings with parents are organized in addition to rallies, cleanliness drives, and sporting events.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Yuwa:**

Yuwa in Jharkhand uses girls' football as a platform for social development in rural India.<sup>9</sup> Through sport they teach life skills with a focus on positive coaching; this encompasses education, health and life choices like marriage. Through team tracking and encouragement in conjunction with coaches who work with the parents too, the girls are empowered with life skills through football.

## **4. Oscar Foundation:**

Through their football program they develop not only football skills but also encourage children and youth of underprivileged backgrounds to be regular in school and complete their education.<sup>10</sup>

## **5. Goal Program by Naz Foundation:**

In 2006 Naz India in partnership with Standard Chartered Bank piloted the Goal program; a women's empowerment program for underprivileged girls in India. Goal uses the sport of netball and life skills education to transform their lives on and off the court. The curriculum focusses on educating them on topics including health, rights, communication, financial literacy & teamwork. This approach greatly reduces their dropout rates. Through its experience in Goal, Naz India has built its capacity to identify, select and train groups of girls to become change agents of tomorrow.<sup>11</sup>

## **6. Slum Soccer:**

The organisation uses football to bring about change in the lives of street dwellers. Football is the means to connect individuals, teach life skills and work towards improving overall quality of life.<sup>12</sup>

# **C. Life Skills Development through Arts**

## **1. NalandaWay:**

NalandaWay trains disadvantaged children using participatory art forms to develop their sense of self-importance and individuality, encourage self-expression, and stimulate imagination as a conduit to achievement.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Music Basti:**

Music Basti partners with schools and existing community organisations to run a life skill through music program for children and adolescents who come from backgrounds of adversity in Delhi. Adversity, as in, the children live in community homes or in slum areas without access to quality education and come from an unstable environment without an enabling support system, thus making them ill-equipped to face life's challenges. The program consists of classes that are fun and engaging and are designed to nurture leadership, creativity, self-confidence and teamwork.<sup>14</sup>

## D. Life Skills Through Multiple Methods

### 1. Dream a Dream:

Dream a Dream is a registered, charitable trust empowering young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast-changing world using a creative life skills approach. The After-School Program is for 8-14-year olds to develop interpersonal, cognitive and creative skills through experiential learning through sport and creative arts. The Career Connect Program is aimed at 14-19-year olds to equip them with skills that make them career ready and converting potential into capabilities. The Teacher Development Program unlocks creativity and empathy among adults who work with young people towards facilitating holistic learning outcomes.<sup>15</sup> In order to measure the impact of the programs, Dream a Dream has developed a standardized life skills measurement tool that has been described above in the research and measurement section.

## E. Teacher Training in Life Skills

### 1. Ritinjali:

Ritinjali believes that it is important to equip teachers with skills to build skills and empower young adolescents. Their program builds life skills of teachers in government schools in Rajasthan using multi-pronged activities such as role-play, simulation exercises, storytelling, creative exercises, games, case studies, inspirational stories, small group discussions and presentations, debates and brainstorming. The teachers in turn, through life skills sessions in the classroom, empower school going adolescents of age 12 to 14 years to make informed choices about their health be it reproductive and sexual health and enhance their knowledge of HIV/AIDS.<sup>16</sup>

### 2. Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF):

KEF is a social change organization started in 2008 with the focus to transform the quality of education in public schools by providing leadership training to school principals. They have partnered with many government, private, and educational institutions, to impact more than 1235 schools in three states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.<sup>17</sup>

## F. Vocational Training

### 1. Pratham Education Foundation:

Pratham launched Pratham Institute, its vocational skilling arm in 2005, with the objective of training youth between ages 18 and 25 years from economically disadvantaged backgrounds of rural areas and urban slums. More specifically, to provide them with employable skills coupled with access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. They conduct short-term courses of 2-3 months, often residential in nature that focus on hands-on skills training and youth counselling. The courses include construction (including electrical, plumbing, masonry and welding), hospitality (housekeeping, food and beverage service

and food production), automotive mechanic, healthcare, nursing, and beauty and wellness services. The model is based on strong industry linkages and includes mobilization from source, training, placement in jobs or entrepreneurship, and post-placement support.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Association for Promotion Social Action (APSA):**

The Kaushalya Skill Training Centre established in 1992 aims to bring job-related training within the reach of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds in urban slums; especially those who are unable to complete schooling and lose the opportunity to get skilled jobs because of lack of necessary academic qualifications or because skill training is unaffordable or inaccessible. They run a one-year skill training course, free of cost, in electronics, tailoring, computers and beauty care with additional inputs on spoken English, life skills education (behaviour, deportment and personality development), sexual health education, banking and budgeting, preparing for an interview; workplace behaviour; conflict management, and decision-making.<sup>19</sup>

## **3. The/Nudge:**

The Nudge Foundation believes that job skills alone are insufficient to help individuals break out of the cycle of poverty. Their Gurukuls, hence, focus on the all-round development of individuals to equip them with life, literacy and livelihood skills through a residential program whose emphasis is experiential learning. On completion of the program individuals are provided with lifelong support to prevent them from falling back into poverty.<sup>20</sup>

## **4. Udaan India Foundation:**

Through its Skills Enhancement Program (SEP), the organization as part of its larger belief and approach to holistic education for all, aims to enhance the employability level of disadvantaged youth through four segments: Computer literacy, Spoken English, Vocational training, and Soft Skills, the last conducted by corporate volunteers to prepare the participants to confront the professional workplace with confidence.<sup>21</sup>

## **5. Lend-A-Hand India:**

The organisations works at the intersection of education and livelihood. They create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the aspiring youth by making school education practical and relevant and by providing job/life skills training, aptitude testing, career counselling, and bridge loan for micro-enterprises.<sup>22</sup>

## **6. Lighthouse by Pune City Connect:**

Pune City Connect (PCC) in association with Pune Municipal Corporation launched the Lighthouse project in 2016 under the Sustainable Livelihood Program. The project aim is to address issues of livelihood generation by establishing centers known as Lighthouses. These centers provide the underprivileged youth of Pune with the chance to explore possibilities to enhance their skills and pursue a meaningful career.<sup>23</sup>

## Net Takeaway: Life Skills Implementation in India

In this section, we have cited some organizations, with a view to representing the variety of work non-governmental organizations are doing in the sector. There are wide differences in the approach, method employed and/or outcomes. Each of these organizations work in specific geographies and/or on specific facets of life skills development; namely, as outside classroom approaches or life skills as part of curriculum approach with a view to holistic education, as training teachers with skills to empower children and young adults, as vocational skilling with a focus on preparing the young for gainful employment or as a combination of these approaches. The common thread is the belief in life skills for life readiness to address the children and young adult's disadvantaged backgrounds and the resultant failure to thrive. The challenge, however, is that work happens primarily in silos and cross collaborative engagement is rare. Dream a Dream is making efforts for sectoral engagement through collaborative action around research, implementation approaches and measurement. However, it is early days yet.

With the challenge for collaborative engagement in mind, we examine the work of **YMCA**, for the insights it might offer for advancement in life skills practice in India. The YMCA founded in 1844 is a leading non-profit organization for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.<sup>24</sup> They recognize that children from low-income families often start school unprepared and despite progressing at the same rate during the school year, gaps widen each summer. These gaps ultimately result in low high school graduation and college attainment rates, limited job prospects, and negative economic impact. In this context they believe that life skills and character development are potential leading factors in changing the trajectory of a low-income student's life. Utilizing the DESSA reports, the YMCA assessment tool, they found that 96% of caregivers cited an increase in their child's ability to engage in positive play and 71% of students who began the school year with less developed social-emotional skills improved in their social-emotional skills; the overall self-efficacy of the students improved by 53%.

The YMCA has over 2,700 branches in the United States. They work with about 9 million youth daily through different program types, one of them being their arts and humanities national program started in 1998. In the year 2015, the YMCA made a nationwide push for character development implementation in all its programs, towards meeting their vision of youth development. The Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI) started with a 20-million dollar, 4-year grant, from S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation in partnerships with the school districts, reveals the strength of private and public-sector collaboration to solve social issues in communities. The mission is to advance effective youth character development practices among adult providers in out-of-school-time settings so that more youth cultivate the character skills and traits necessary to reach their full potential. They intend to scale this nationwide to leverage the contact of adult providers with millions of youth in programs and locations across the country. Furthermore, individual branches of the YMCA have

different models for implementing life skills learning opportunities for students of adversity in their communities, some of them being:

- PrimeTime is a government grant funded after school program that has partnered with a YMCA to create a holistic approach to academic enrichment for students attending low-income schools. Through project-based learning, students learn skills in communication, time-management, problem-solving, and thinking critically
- Austin Texas YMCA has created a new program titled Y Life Skills! This is for children of ages 8-13 years and offers effective lessons and skills to succeed in life; more specifically to learn ways to think for themselves, to appropriately prioritize their needs and become prepared for later parts of life
- The YMCA of Northern Alberta, Canada has developed a Youth Transitions Program (YTP) to provide support to youth aged 13 -19 years old. Youth advisors meet with youth from all walks of life to help them overcome their barriers and support them in reaching their fullest potential through a program that consists of eight sessions and covers topics including, but not limited to, self-esteem, anger management, healthy relationships, communication, self-image, and social media safety

The YMCA approach demonstrates the strength of implementation that stems from an understanding of the theoretical importance of SEL and its impact, utilization of research and assessments to monitor and assess the importance of SEL, and the importance of scaling and development of a PPP model to leverage the importance of SEL at a national level.

The challenge in India is one of finding ways to increase cross collaborative sectoral engagement that besides engaging with each other through their work also brings to the fore the importance of positioning that work within the problem of adversity and failure to thrive. This with a view that solutions are imagined as preparing disadvantaged children and young adults for the challenges of contemporary 21st century Indian life rather than on merely skilling them for employment towards optimizing the country's demographic dividend. Trends show that new organizations in the education space are already integrating diverse life skills approaches in their program design and this is encouraging.

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation. <http://learning-curve-foundation.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>2</sup> VOICE4Girls: Her VOICE. <http://voice4girls.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>3</sup> Mentor Together. <http://mentortogether.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>4</sup> Diksha Foundation. <http://dikshafoundation.org/> (Accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>5</sup> Apni Shala Foundation. <http://www.apnishala.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>6</sup> Just for Kicks. <http://www.jfkindia.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>7</sup> Magic Bus: Sports for Development Program. <http://www.magicbus.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>8</sup> More information on Magic Bus's livelihood program efforts can be found at <https://educationinnovations.org/program/magic-bus-sports-development-program> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>9</sup> Yuwa. <https://www.yuwa-india.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Foundation. <http://www.oscar-foundation.org/programmes/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>11</sup> Goal Program by Naz Foundation. <http://nazindia.org/goal/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>12</sup> Slum Soccer. <http://www.slumsoccer.org/aboutUs.php?cont=3> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>13</sup> NalandaWay Foundation. <http://www.nalandaway.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>14</sup> Music Basti. <https://www.facebook.com/MusicBasti/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>15</sup> Dream a Dream. <http://dreamadream.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>16</sup> Ritinjali. <http://www.ritinjali.org/home> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>17</sup> Kaivalya Education Foundation. <http://www.kefindia.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>18</sup> Pratham Education Foundation. <http://www.pratham.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>19</sup> Kaushalya Skill Training Centre. <http://www.apsabangalore.org/project/kaushalya-skill-training-centre/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>20</sup> The/Nudge. <https://www.thenudge.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>21</sup> Udaan India Foundation. <https://www.udaanindiafoundation.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>22</sup> Lend-A-Hand India. <https://www.lend-a-hand-india.org/> (accessed on 2/8/2018)

<sup>23</sup> Lighthouse by Pune City Connect. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/Lighthouse-project-launched/articleshow/53231027.cms> (accessed on 2/8/2018).

<sup>24</sup> Information in this section has been sourced from <http://www.ymca.net/index.php> (accessed on 2/8/2018).



# CONCLUSIONS & WAY FORWARD

A close and comprehensive reading of secondary sources towards mapping life skills research, policy and practice in India has revealed to us that the primary challenges ahead for us are the following:

## 1. Research in the Indian context:

While there has been extensive research on aspects of Child Adversity and its impact on children, namely, the role of Life Skills on improving learning outcomes and the role of Life Skills on improving life outcomes; there is very little research done from a developing country context and from looking at the extent, depth and complexity of adversity from an Indian context. There needs to be pertinent research questions asked across academia, policy makers and practitioners and we need to build a body of knowledge seeped in evidence to inform further research, policy and implementation strategies.

## 2. Life Skills as foundation to learning and life:

In traditional constructs, life skills has been looked at as a value-add to academic learning and outcomes. What is becoming clear is that life skills are foundational to overcoming adversity, achieving development milestones and helping children develop the capacities needed to thrive in an increasingly complex and uncertain future. This has strong implications for education policy, strategy and implementation. For instance, we will need to look at what is important to expose children to, during the early years of learning. We might need to redesign the school calendar to incorporate life skills as being as critical as numeracy and literacy. It has implications on implementation models too, as we will have to relook at pedagogy, curriculum design and implementation models. We will need to explore implementation models that integrate project based learning, experiential learning, empathy based pedagogies. We will also need to relook at Teacher training in both pre-service and in-service areas to incorporate life skills.

## 3. Redefine the definition of success:

Success in traditional parameters has been defined in economic terms. In an increasingly complex and uncertain future scenario, we will need to redefine and reimagine success that goes beyond economic success. We propose Thriving as a term to define success in the future and the role of life skills in helping young people thrive. The idea of thriving, Hannon & Peterson (2017) suggest “shifts the focus to what children and young people need to be allowed to experience and do now as part of their experience of school-not to develop a set of abstract skills, but to learn to live in new and better ways, taking charge of the future so they can shape it and deal with its challenges (p. 13-14). Furthermore, thriving they suggest should be supported at the following levels; at an individual level, at the level of family, and community. This finally results in a thriving planet (Hannon & Peterson, 2017). We need to

explore the idea of Thriving, unwrap it, research on it and use it to bring on board new policy frameworks and implementation models. Life skills as defined by the WHO, as skills to prepare the young so that they can participate in 21st century living, must thus be foregrounded as an important task to address the problem of adversity of India.

#### **4. Child adversity at the forefront of life skills:**

As we have detailed in this report, the problem currently is one of a missing articulation of adversity as it stands in India today; one of physical stunting in a significant number of young children accompanied by psychosocial, emotional and mental health problems. These children as a result are catching up to development. Adversity, currently articulated as a problem of employment readiness rather than life readiness of the children, adolescents, and young adults, is in our mind the core challenge that needs urgent addressing. Evidence in the form of theoretical or institutional research, thus, in our mind, must stem from the need to address adversity in all its complexity in India.

#### **5. Mapping implementation models:**

There are many innovative models of implementation spread across the country, largely driven by NGOs. We will need to do a comprehensive mapping exercise to understand different models, explore their innovations, bring them together, create opportunities for sharing and learning from different approaches and celebrate their uniqueness within their contexts. This will help us not only consolidate efforts but also give us access to models that can be localized and others that can be adopted by the government and scaled as innovations.

#### **6. Build collaborative impact networks:**

Organizations, practitioners, donors, researchers, academicians, policy makers will need to come together to build a shared understanding of the complex challenges faced by young people in the 21st century, develop a shared understanding of what young people will need to thrive in the new world and how our approaches are supporting that journey for each young person. This will also encourage cross-collaborative efforts for research and scale.

In conclusion, research design and methods must thus address the benefits of a life skills approach from the early formative years of a child to young adulthood and position this within the theoretical rubric of adversity and the resultant failure to thrive. Furthermore, this research must be collaborative and of international standards; so that the importance of life skills as an approach rather than as an accompanying intervention to existing approaches to education as academic outcomes and/or preparedness for employment through vocational skilling, is leveraged as one of national importance.

This leads us to the next domain of crucial importance, that is, policy. We believe that there is an urgent need for voicing the criticality of life skills through national and state policy. This in our mind would require a policy change from one of defining the problem as one of employment readiness to that of life readiness. Unless the young are holistically prepared for life, we believe, the opportunity our demographic dividend offers us cannot be met. This in turn would mean that the supportive NGO community working on life skills must find a way for cross collaborative work to make a collective impact in the sector today.

These challenges must be addressed, in our mind, to transform the current research, policy, and implementation work on life skills in India such that it resonates with the need of the young to overcome adversity and flourish as citizens of 21st century India.



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