

Life Skills Training (LST) Program for Young People: Justifications, Foundations and Contents

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Abstract

Life skills training (LST) is an important tool supporting healthy developmental transitions into adulthood. Although it has been in Ethiopia for some time, it was narrowly conceived, non-contextualized, and lacked uniformity and collaborative spirit among implementing partners. This paper discussed the importance of instituting LST for young persons aged 10 to 24 years and then delineated the foundations that give essence to LST programming. Having set out these foundations, then it attempted to sketch out the LST program package mainly focusing on the meaning, goals, and life skills categories for possible inclusion. Extensive review of related research was carried out towards achieving these objectives. The paper argued that there are lots of concerns out there on the ground that make LST provision a necessity. These concerns can be addressed if LST programming is contextually relevant. These context-friendly conceptions and designs were finally pointed out at length including how LST be understood, its ultimate goals, and the general and specific life skills categories that need to be integrated in a program claiming to be offered for young people in Ethiopia.

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Keywords: Life skills; Risk factors; HIV/AIDS; Ethiopian youth; Adolescence; Young persons

Introduction

Adolescence is a stage in the life span whereby young persons undergo through fundamental biological, cognitive, and social changes [1,2]. Radically "transforming the growing person from that of a child to an adult" [3] these characteristically "universal changes of adolescence" [2] still trigger (psychosocial) changes that eventually capacitate attainment of a clear sense of identity [1,2]. However, going through adolescence and achieving this adult status is in most cases challenging [4]. It is not uncommon to observe young person's experiencing difficulties of one kind or another [5]. Some even encounter serious psychosocial and behavioral problems of either an internalizing or externalizing sort [6] that seriously disrupt not only their lives [7] but also the lives of those around them [8,9].

Life skills approach has been found to enhance adolescent transitions by building skills that are essential components of healthy development and skills that define a resilient child. Evidences suggest that life skills approach promotes social, cognitive, emotional and behavioral competencies that are critical in reducing negative or high-risk behaviors (delay the onset of drug use, prevent high-risk sexual behaviors, reduce anger and violence), as well as numerous positive attitudes, social adjustments, healthy life styles, and, even academic performance among adolescents [10-14]. Above and beyond individual benefits, life skills programs still promote positive social norms that can impact on the greater environment of adolescent health services, schools, staff and families [15]. According to UNICEF, National HIV/

AIDS Council Secretariat and others, LST makes many other societal (educational, social, cultural, legal, economic...) contributions. For example, educationally, life skills training may, by introducing the interactive teaching methodology into the formal lecture-based teaching and learning process, still improve, teacher-student relationship, motivation of students to learn, teachers' job satisfaction and professional ethicality, student dropouts and absenteeism rates, peace and stability in the school environment, and learning of and achievement in academic subjects. Socially, life skills training promote development of a social setting that is with lesser antisocial behaviors, crime, and delinquency. Economically, focusing on prevention than cure, the life skills approach is a cost-effective strategy of supporting the development of young persons. And culturally, life skills promote mutual respect, tolerance, and related values that are highly needed particularly in multicultural societies like Ethiopia (UNICEF and National HIV/AIDS Council Secretariat, Undated).

There are in fact many NGOs and GOs working to promote life skills development in young people. Appreciative of such efforts and the contributions made there in, it would be doing injustices to slide over some of the limitations they inhere in serving the needs of the Ethiopian youth at large. Evidences [16,17] and experiences, too, seem to show that some of such efforts are mainly limited thematically (mainly focus on problems- abuse, HIV/AIDS, poverty...), spatially (mainly target the urban youth), temporally (short-lived), and demographically (center on girls, on young persons from lower SES). Because the focus in some cases is mainly on problems than building strengths, it is tantamount to treating the symptoms than causes, or prescribing cures than preventions, and, hence, are not sustainable and cost-effective in many ways. Even when such efforts focus on strengths,

they are not cost-effective because they target building specific skills of one kind or another (e.g. dealing with HIV/AIDS) rather than promoting an overall life skill development that would rather help the target groups effectively cop with the different challenges of their own developmental needs and that of life at large. There is largely an exclusive emphasis on life skills within the context of HIV/AIDS which has created confusion by making HIV prevention and life skills to be used interchangeably [16-18]. There was also a serious concern that the process has been sporadic and lacking in quality [17]. Preliminary assessments have also suggested that the key elements of the various programs had other gaps: Most of the programs lacked strategic perspectives, high focus on activities being carried out rather than intended outcomes, standard guidelines provided to ensure consistency of the program and quality assurance, established and standard curriculum for life skills education, and national framework or guideline for life skills is not developed.... (P.15). There has been lack of coordination and joint venture among stakeholders towards a common goal mainly because there has not been a commonly acceptable framework of life skills education in the first place. This lack of coordinated venture among stakeholders would also impact on the coverage and sustainability of these programs. Last but more important, many NGOs and GOs working on life skills in Ethiopia today are implementing life skills programs using their own manuals that are imported from elsewhere and are unlikely to address local needs. They tend to define and strategize life skills and its categories in different ways which, at the same time, may not center on local contexts of the trainees.

In fact, all these problems are due in part to lack of a general national life skills framework that would help to translate the Ethiopian Youth Policy [19,20] and development packages [21,22] by giving clear specification and direction to the stakeholders working on various youth development programs and projects. The implication is generally then that there is a need for a more effective, positive-oriented, holistic, coordinated, cost-effective and contextually relevant national life skills education program and framework that avails such provisions to the greater majority of the Ethiopian younger population. This paper attempts to discuss the nature of life skills training that has to be planted in the in the Ethiopian soil so that a national framework would eventually grow out of it. It tries to shed light on such questions as, "what should be the meaning of life skills training in Ethiopia?" "What are the contextual foundations that structure life skills training in Ethiopia? What should be the goals of life skills programs in Ethiopia? What general and specific life skills categories can be derived from these goals and are, therefore, relevant to the Ethiopian reality...? The purpose of this paper is then to set out a ground for consensus building among relevant stakeholders about the nature of life skills training for young people in Ethiopia so that they would collaborate on for a common goal in a sustainable manner.

In trying to answer these meet these objectives, the paper begins by expounding why LST is deemed necessary in Ethiopia in the first place: Needs, contexts and justifications. Capitalizing on this discussion, the next section is focused on documenting the LST program content in Ethiopia: Definitions, program goals and life skills categories. Extensive review of local research literature on young persons in Ethiopia has been made to present relevant views and data for our present purpose. These research literatures were used to identify

developmental concerns and strengths, and delineate that nature of the LST program package that would help addressing these concerns and capacities.

Why LST in Ethiopia

Needs, contexts and justification

There are fundamental scenarios and concerns that justify as well as define the role of life skills education for young people in Ethiopia above and beyond the fact that life skills is the legal rights of young people, that Ethiopia is a country of young persons and can't afford to continue marginalizing the majority, and that young persons' need for life skills training is a universal developmental need. These concerns relate to the contextual (economic, social, cultural, and health related) factors of development in Ethiopia.

Economic factors: There is rampant poverty in the country causing a host of problems on children and young persons including negotiated schooling, street life, migration, youth unemployment, child labor etc. According to CSA estimate for 2004, youth unemployment rates were projected to be about 68% and 64 % of all ages for urban and rural areas respectively. These estimates were higher for young females than males that constitute over 65 % and 75 % for urban and rural areas respectively (CSA, 2001). Many children lead street life to cope with problems posed by poverty and also that life in the street is accompanied with a host of deprivations [23-25], abuses (physical, sexual, and verbal) and harassments of various forms including those posed by police and gangs, and negative attitude towards the street children and youth (i.e. considering them as criminals, thieves...) that makes them the primary culprits when crime occurs in their surroundings.

A comprehensive household survey conducted by CSA [26] with a sample of 43,601 households in all the regions covering the situation of children aged 5 to 17 years found that only 38% were attending school, 85% were engaged in some kind of income-generating and household activities, and 38% combined schooling and work. At the same time, many adolescents are forced to work in extremely exploitative conditions, for example as domestic workers¹, sex workers², and sitting on top of long distance lorries as assistants to drivers. Studies also indicated that many of the children and young persons in the streets had migrated from the rural areas, that this was even more for girls, and that the majority of these girls join child prostitution [27]. A study on adolescent life in low-income areas of Addis Ababa found that over one third of the sample had migrated into Addis from other regions and far more girls (43%) had migrated than boys (29%). In a study conducted on the problem and trends of sexual exploitation of children in selected areas of Nazreth [27], the majority of child prostitutes join this profession during adolescence period; the majority were migrants from rural areas as the case is in street children.

Migration is not confined only to internal movement but also cross border migration with many young Ethiopians trying to go abroad in search of better economic opportunities. Such large-scale migration opens the door for trafficking; in a 2003 survey conducted by IOM on 600 respondents in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Awassa, Shashenene, Nazreth, and Gondar, 7% of the potential migrants to Arab countries

1 For example, about 12% of the adolescent girls aged 10-14 living without either parent in poor areas of Addis Ababa were domestic workers.

2 It was estimated by the Labor and Social Affairs Officer in Dessie that at least half of the sex workers in the town, of which there are estimated to be more than 1,000, were below the age of 18.

and 6.6% of the returnees were in the age group of 15 to 18: poverty, unemployment, and lack of prospects being identified as the major factors [28]. In an earlier research, it was found that 20% of the domestic and sex workers had been trafficked. The Youth Situation Analysis also gave many examples of trafficking and the 'broker' who convinces girls to migrate is one of the most sinister figures in their portrayals [17].

Socio-cultural issues: Ethiopia is a country of diversity with different nationalities requiring the young persons' develop skills for living effectively with others. Moreover, evidences suggest that life within the various ethnic groups is basically collectivist-oriented, with interdependent life style, and authoritarian culture [29]. This would mean the need on the part of young persons to develop skills for interdependence, cooperation and sharing. In as much as there are these virtues to be developed, Ethiopia is a country having harmful cultural practices that value early marriage as useful, gender inequality (though little changes in the present years) as ordained by God, assertiveness as rudeness and non-assertiveness as decency; open-mindedness and independence as threats to tradition and culture; violence and aggression as bravery (so much so that violence against girls including abduction have already become but part of the normal fight); and mediation/ intermediation rather than direct negotiation as common practices of resolving interpersonal conflicts. Yet mediation/ intermediation occur not proactively to stop possible harm ensuing conflicts but mainly following possible harms that has to be terminated to avoid revenge and further escalation of conflicts.

Youth participation concerns: Ethiopian youth has played a significant role shaping the course of Ethiopian history [30,31]. However, except for involvements in some government-induced/ initiated and controlled youth associations (e.g. Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association in the last regime), national campaigns (e.g. National Development Campaign, National Military Service...), and, in more recent years, in some HIV prevention programs in different ways (e.g. HIV clubs in school conducting some door-to-door campaigns), the young persons in Ethiopia have hardly involved in true youth participation that can reflect a genuine partnership in which both young people and adults have agreed to their responsibilities. Such marginalization and deprivation of young persons have led them either to organize themselves underground in many occasions, or else to take the law into their hands and publicly make their voices heard but in very destructive ways as the unfortunate happenings of the Red Terror era of the Socialist Regime. On the contrary, it is not uncommon to see many young persons in Ethiopia forcibly inducted in to adult roles but unfortunately very early in life; before they are developmentally ready to such roles. This is particularly the case of child-heads of household which has become increasingly common in recent years in families where parents are deceased because of the HIV/AIDS endemic. The young persons are observed to prematurely withdraw from their own life goals and labor day-in day-out to care and support their orphaned siblings [32]. Early marriage is another common notorious practice that can be cited as an example of forced induction in to the world of adulthood [33].

Substance abuse: Substance abuse was recorded as a common practice in many of the previous research on young persons in Ethiopia. For example, drug use and abuse [34,35] cigarette smoking [36], and alcohol abuse.

Violence, crime and antisocial behaviors: Parent-adolescent conflicts [37,38], school disciplinary problems in different secondary schools [39,40], delinquency [41] and child offences in which from April to

December 2004 alone, a total of 2,382 cases were registered in Addis Ababa of which the major offences were temporary disagreement/fight (47.9%), injuries (12.7%), sexual offences (9.9%), theft (7.7%), insult/ threat (7.1%), snatching/Extortion (4.9%), and homicide (2.7%) [42].

Sexual behavior, HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health: early sexual exposure and HIV/AIDS were found to be common problems. A survey of adolescent fertility and reproductive behavior and employment status of youth population in urban Ethiopian indicated that 50.2% males and 21.2 % females in the 15-29 years age category had experienced sexual intercourse. Of the unmarried youth, this proportion is 22.9% for males and 5.4% for females between ages 15-17 had experienced. According to UNICEF, USAIDS, and WHO [43], in 12 Sub-Sahara African countries, at least 10% of those aged 15 to 49 are estimated to be infected with HIV. According to this report, the majority of new infections in this region are among young people aged 15 to 24 [43]. It was found that adolescents having sex early are more likely to have sex with high risk partners or multiple partners, and are less likely to use condoms implying that delaying the age at which young people can start first sex can significantly protect them from infection (p.11). The vulnerability of youth to HIV infection and the actual threat of the AIDS epidemic to the health and wellbeing of the young people in Ethiopia have accordingly come high. A study examining sexual behavior and level of knowledge of AIDS and other STDs among a small sample of senior high school students in Addis Ababa showed that that over 1/3 of the students have experienced sex and most of them never used any protective means to avoid STDs. About 70.5% had first sex between the ages of 14-16 years and the number of persons they had sex with ranged from 1 to 5 [44].

According to a Demographic Health Survey [45] conducted with a sample of 3,710 women in Ethiopia, 16% of women aged 15-19 years have already become mothers with their first child or were pregnant at the time of the survey. In addition to the relatively higher level of pregnancy complications among young mothers, due to physiological immaturity, inexperience associated with childcare practices also influences maternal and infant health. Moreover, an early start to childbearing greatly reduces the educational and employment opportunities of women and is associated with higher level of fertility. According to an assessment of health care facilities, schools, and development agencies conducted in 1999, large number of adolescents face unwanted pregnancies, die from unsafe abortion, and contract HIV/AIDS. The MoH described the number of youth dying from unsafe abortion as shocking and as a national epidemic. Close to 70% of women who seek medical attention for incomplete abortion are less than 24 years of age. As one of the leading causes of maternal mortality in Ethiopia, botched abortions result in 55% of fatalities, 13% of which are adolescent girls [46]. According to this same report, one hospital alone in Axum reports 15 incomplete abortion a month, with many of the girls admitted as young as 12 (p.27). Hospital records in five government hospitals in AA indicated that there were a total of 7,364 abortion cases admitted (in 1977 and 78 E.C) of whom 916 were under 20 years. According to a statistics in St. Paul Hospital [47], there were a total of 473 spontaneous and 250 illegal abortion cases handled in this Hospital of whom 34 spontaneous (8%) and 65 (24.8%) were for ages 15-19 years. It is surprising to note, on the other hand, that while many adolescents may know about contraceptives, not many use them. A 1997 study on young people in Eastern Ethiopia showed that nearly 70% of males and 64% of females believe to know about family planning methods. Yet, only 25% of them have ever utilized any such method [46].

Mental and emotional problems: Family Guidance Association Youth Program Section [48] has compiled figures about attempted and completed suicide from hospital and police sources in Addis Ababa and surrounding towns for a period of about 18 months. According to this report, suicide appears prevalent among young persons. Just to mention some observations from the report:

According to Data obtained from Yekatit 12 Hospital for 18 months (July 1986- february 1988 E.C.), there were a total of 130 attempted suicide (20 were boys with less than 20 years of age and 62 were girls with less than 20 years of age).

Data obtained from Region 14 Policy Commission for 18 months (1987-88 first six months of) indicated that 199 males and 22 females have committed suicide. About 60-80 were reported to be in the period of youth. Among the reported causes were mental illness, unwanted pregnancy, loss of parental ties, conflict in the family, and financial problems, and other unknown causes

Two and half years data obtained from Nazreth Hailemariam Mamo Hospital showed about 106 adolescents have attempted suicide

Eighteen months data from Debrezeit Hospital showed 110 young persons have attempted suicide

Six months data obtained from Ambo Hospital showed 31 male and 58 female young persons have attempted suicide

Ambo Zone Police report indicated that in 1987 alone 39 young persons attempted and 27 died of suicide

More recent studies still document social adjustment difficulties [49,50] of young persons, chronic health conditions [51] as well as psychological distress [52] of significant proportions of young persons. The different research findings reviewed in our discussion above implicate that young persons in Ethiopia are indeed vulnerable to a host of problems. These problems could be familial, extra familial, and societal in their origins. But, it is still believed that lack of basic life skills could either exacerbate the problems or can even serve as a possible antidote to these problems. This issue is discussed in better detail in our latter discussion that attempts to delineate the scope of LST in Ethiopia.

In sum, the different research reports summarized above suggest a number of important implications for LST programming for young persons in Ethiopia. First and foremost, although many of the problems are mainly attributable to external factors, lack of basic life skills is still exacerbating these problems; thus increasing their vulnerability to risk. Major among these problems, to be discussed in a better detail in our latter discussion, are, for example, problems in cognitive skills including difficulties in decision making, self-control, and goal setting; problems in interpersonal skills including non-assertiveness, peer influences, negotiation difficulties, and difficulties observed in conflict management; and problems in emotional skills or coping skills. Moreover, living in Ethiopia today being a source of certain risk factors, young persons would have also somehow protected themselves had they been equipped with certain skills in situation-management. In the face prevailing social, cultural, economic, or non-individual causation of risk factors, one would still say that group rather than individual responses would better serve a protective role; thus implying the need to build skills in this regard, too.

The LST Program Package

Definitions, goals, and categories of LST in Ethiopia

Having gone all through the theoretical discussions and contextual analysis held so far, in fact to pave the way for our present discussion; it is then natural to ask at this point, "What exactly does a life skills program look like for training young people in Ethiopia? In order to address this central question, all the remaining parts of our discussion move from the theoretical and contextual analysis into the specifics of life skills programming: LST program definition, goals, life skills categories, and related others.

Definition of Life Skills

What LST is supposed to be in the Ethiopian context?

"Life skills" approach is a very recent phenomenon in Africa including Ethiopia. We may generally say that it is conspicuous by its absence from academic and public discourses until very recent years that witnessed HIV/AIDS becoming a real threat to the future of an entire generation. The realization that the only option to mitigate against this epidemic is prevention than cure, on the one hand, and that the anti-AIDS campaigns that became popular methods of imparting knowledge about the ABCs of HIV were ineffective to bring about the required behavioral changes, on the other hand, gradually led some international NGOs (like UNICEF) working with young persons and HIV/AIDS to begin to lend support to life skills training and, accordingly, introduced it as a priority area of prevention efforts [53]. In Ethiopia, for example, UNICEF has begun promoting life skills/peer education and training for young people (since 2002) as one of its major strategy towards youth-development and HIV/AIDS prevention in the country [16]. In this time period, UNICEF has, in collaboration with other offices (mainly national and regional HIV/AIDS prevention and control offices), prepared a life skills/peer education training guidelines and outcome indicators, and, accordingly, undertaken a number of ToT and refresher trainings for in and out of school youths and teachers in some regions of the Country. These initiatives needed to be appreciated but we need at the same time to avoid such narrowed conception of Life Skills application.

In a manner to circumventing this problem, we may, for our present purpose, consider life skills as a comprehensive behavior change approach that attempts to scaffold the holistic development of the young person through the use of gender-and youth-friendly training programs that build knowledge, information, values and attitudes, and skills in Ethiopia (ages 10 to 24 years) through training method that is completely interactive, uses role-plays, games, puzzles, group discussions, and a variety of other innovative teaching techniques to keep the participant wholly involved in the sessions.

To elaborate on this description, life skills is, first and foremost, an approach rather than a program with clearly defined blueprint of objectives and contents. When it is treated as a training program, the way it is in our present case, the contents there-in are suggested guides rather than rigid set of syllabi that foreclose upcoming experiences, needs, and situations. Secondly, life skills is a training rather being an educative practice. Although these words are interchangeable used in almost all life skills literature including those mentioned above, the concept "education" is basically focused to building cognitive knowledge with its postponed application to real life situation [54] compared to the concept "training" whose objectives, approaches, and

implications all center around immediate application of a learned-stuff; thus skill-building being a central focus. Third, life skills training as used in our present framework addresses, alike the previous conceptions, the complete range of psychological dimensions of human beings that encompass issues pertaining to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains or simply, knowledge, attitudes/values, and skills. Fourth, unlike the conceptions above which simply outlined the fundamental goals of LST in a seemingly similar fashion to all nations of the world, our present view delineates, however, a relatively more extended view-commensurate with the objective and subjective conditions of Ethiopia. In our present view, LST is meant to address skills necessary for personal growth and interpersonal living; but, at the same time, building skills necessary for promoting social/group or societal development. We may, in other words, broadly describe life skills as a training program/approach, for young persons, to enable them meet their functional needs (personal, interpersonal, and societal concerns) holistically.

Finally, our LST targets those young persons with ages 10-24 years and these young persons who are assumed to be potentially adults and, therefore need to get respect and friendly treatments, have an urge for self-directionality and/or independence, assume responsibility in shaping their own learning, take part in planning, conducting, and evaluating their own learning, and have rich experiences to bring to the training situation that can contribute to enriching their own learning and that of others.

Our life skills approach conceived above is based on the following principles that are uniformly employed in almost all life skills programs (including UNICEF ESARO, 2006, P.5): [53].

Skill-building methodology that requires sufficient time to define and promote specific skills through rehearsal and action, that support and foster skills acquisition and performance through observation, practice and feedback, and ensuring skills maintenance and generalization through personal practice, self-evaluation and skill adjustment.

Learner-centred, whereby learners are facilitated, supported, and guided so that they can learn by themselves: teach themselves than being taught by others, to construct meaning in their lives than to be told meanings they should draw from their own life.

Active, whereby learners learn by doing, performance than mere instruction.

Collaborative and participatory, thus making learning a social process through which learners construct meaning in dialogue with others, particularly peers.

Inclusive, as it is equally applicable to all groups of young persons (younger-older, male-female, well to do-poor, while-black...)

Strength-based, as it purports to build on positives, strengths, and potentials rather than focusing on weaknesses, limitations, and deficits.

Preventive than curative, as it tries to build tools for promoting development and reducing risks.

Holistic, as it tries to click on all the domains of development rather than just part of it.

Process rather than product-centred; teaching young people how to think rather than what to think; helping them learn themselves rather than teaching them to learn.

Cost-effective and in-ward looking rather than out-ward focused, and culturally relevant rather than universal, and group (including gender) sensitive.

Generally, by assisting young people learn how to think rather than what to think, by providing them with the tools for solving problems, making decisions and managing emotions, and by engaging them through participative methodologies, our life skills program is expected to empower the young persons' overall physical, emotional, social development; help them develop those personal and social skills that are necessary to function effectively in everyday life, and to contribute positively to the development of others who partake responsibilities in the making of young persons. The core aspect of the LST programming that empower young people towards these health direction require specification and definition of the actual LST program goals and life skills categories that need to be addressed in the training process.

Program Goals

What needs to be the general program goals of LST Programming in Ethiopia?

Overview: Adolescence is a developmental stage bridging the world of childhood and adulthood. Being in this developmental plane, young persons characteristically retain a blend of the potentials of adults and the limitations of children: ability to think in terms of principles like adults-yet less considerate of the pragmatic qualities life like children; ability for independence-yet a desire for care, support, and protection; need to be supported-yet ability to support the supporter... Successfully navigating through this period of transition and achieving healthy and mature adult status is, therefore, contingent on a host of internal and external factors. It has been shown that equipping young persons with basic life skills is one of the major factors that assist them to optimize their developmental potentials, protect them from risk, and/ or even to achieve resilience in the face of adversity. Obviously, helping young persons in this regard promises a healthy and mature society in the long run. Others even hold the view that societal benefits are not just future promises; young persons effectively equipped with basic life skills have a lot to contribute in the making of their nations here and now.

Meaning and assumptions: our understanding of life skills and LST program is based on the certain assumptions: 1) because life skills originate from our daily encounters, it is likely that they differ developmentally, culturally, nationally, and historically, 2) life skills are meant to promote the growth of self as an agent of change for healthy personal, interpersonal, group, and societal development. This implies that equipping young persons (with life skills that are developmentally, culturally, nationally, and historically appropriate) is in a way empowering their immediate others (intimate friends, siblings, and parents), and their peers/communities at large, and 3) LST program that makes these contributions is likely to be sustainable in the long run.

Goals of the LST program: In general, against a backdrop of the developmental needs and general contexts of development in Ethiopia, we may expect that the present LST program goals encompass "four-level benefits" in one: Personal level (benefits for young persons), interpersonal level (benefits for young persons' immediate associates or significant others- siblings, intimate friends, parents/guardians), community level (the local community/school where this LST program

is implemented), and program level (implementation of the LST program having self-serving benefits).

Goal 1 (personal level): The primary goal of the LST program is to enable young persons to manage their own development (for program attendants): Enriching the potentials and strengths they have as young persons, reducing their developmental and contextual vulnerabilities, and improving their resiliency when predisposed to risks of one kind or another.

Goal 2 (interpersonal level): The secondary goal of the LST program is to enable young persons influence the life of significant others (for Program attendants' immediate associates): Acquire repertoire of skills, behaviors, and values that become exemplary in their surroundings; develop increased sensitivity, concern, ability and skills to make interventions for the same cause in their surrounding; and reduce risky behaviors (violence, HIV/AIDS infection, unwise use of resources...) among persons significant, closer to program recipient young persons (siblings, parents, friends...).

Goal 3 (community/school level): In a seemingly contagious (transfer) effect of the positive impacts of this program from program attendants to those around them, this LST program is expected to serve the tertiary goal of reducing the prevalence of risky behaviors (violence, HIV/AIDS infection, unwise use of resources...) in the local community it is conducted in.

Goal 4 (program level): Last but important goal is that by empowering young persons, their significant others, and their community, the LST program also has the goal of expanding, sustaining, and eventually institutionalizing itself in the areas that are targeted for delivery in general.

Life Skills Categories

What Life Skills categories are supposed to be cultivated to achieve the above goals?

As repeatedly shown earlier, the life skills categories identified in this section are selected keeping in view the fundamental developmental needs of young persons (possibly shared universally with others of their age), and the specific demands (opportunities-challenges, potentials- threats, expectations) of growing up in Ethiopia today. Hence, in order to make the selected life skills adequate and relevant representations of these issues, attempts are made in the selection process to address the different dimensions and purposes of young persons' engagements in life. Goal-wise, attempts are made to ensure that skills would enable building basic resources of life: psychological, material, and other non-material resources. Moreover, attempts are made to tune the skills along all directions of empowerment: promotional (improving the strength already available), preventive (modifying skills which otherwise predispose to risk), and curative (inculcating skills that lead to recovery from problem). Subject-wise, attempts are made to address major "subjects" young persons would encounter in the course of their interaction with the external reality: humans (persons), situations, physical environment, and social/cultural encounters. With respect to interaction with humans: attempts are made to cover almost all levels of interaction- personal, interpersonal, group, and societal.

Accordingly, below is the list of the major categories and sub-categories of these selected life skills (Figure 1):

Level I: Personal skills

- Cognitive skills: critical thinking, decision making, problem solving
- Socio-emotional skills
- Personal resources management skills

Level II: Interpersonal skills

- Communication skills: assertiveness, negotiation, conflict management skills
- Interdependence skills: empathy, help-seeking, help giving skills

Level III: Group skills

- With-in group (team work) skills
- Out-group skills

Level IV: Macro-level, ecosystem skills

- Situation management skills
- Societal skills

Note that there is an interrelationship among these skills. Moreover, it is also believed that skills in the first level are possibly the foundations for those in the second level, which in turn becomes foundational for the subsequent level.

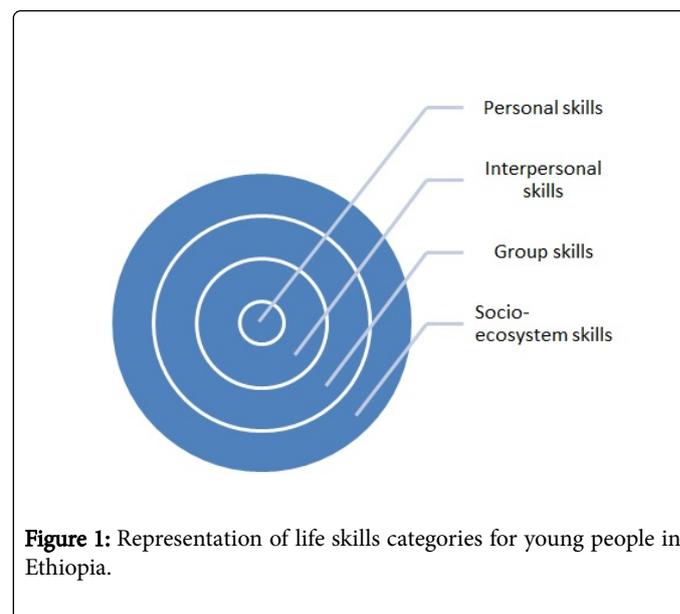


Figure 1: Representation of life skills categories for young people in Ethiopia.

In the section that follows attempts are made to elaborate on these levels of life skills categories. In each case efforts are made to give justification for inclusion by borrowing evidences already presented earlier under the discussion on the contextual and theoretical foundations.

Level 1: Personal Skills

It has been shown previously that the fundamental changes that occur in adolescence empower young persons with adult-like potentials. However, although empowered in many ways, risk-taking behavior commonly accompanies the biological, cognitive, social and

psychological changes of adolescence mainly because many of the adult-like capacities are only emerging, inexperienced, unrefined, and endowed with some limitations. Hence, young persons as yet require care and support, guidance, and opportunities to further up development of these capacities. However, it has been shown that the Ethiopia context (social, cultural, economic...) seems to portray that the young persons are not provided with such care and support as much as needed. Although legal and policy formulations were already in place to improve provisions and some positive changes were registered implementing these laws and policies, the general situation would still appear to predispose development of young persons to risk. It appears that provision for and access to services (health, information, education, employment, recreation, participation) are inadequate; that negative provisions and harmful practices (abuse, early marriage, punishment, systematic exclusion from social participation...) are rampant, and hence many young persons' potentials would not develop as expected. Rather, many young persons live under difficult circumstances (poverty, streetism, displacement and migration, orphanage institutions...) and livelihood problems like unemployment [55], school dropout, substance abuse, emotional problems, child prostitution...) with a saddening early encounter of such health compromising/risky ventures as sexual intercourse (Solomon cited in FGAE, 1996), antisocial behaviors [42], drug use [34,35], street life [24], and child prostitution [27].

Engagement in risk would imply that such young people are less diligent and adept to control their growing impulses, resist temptations around them, and delay gratification. Evidences suggest that these young persons hardly seem to possess personal skills to be deployed to (1) evaluate risk at the beginning and prevent the very initiation of these problems, (2) problem solving skills to terminate them afterwards, and/ or (3) self-management skills even to effectively live with them. It could be, first and foremost, that the requisite cognitive abilities (decision making skills) are only emerging (less sophisticated, lack criticality, and pragmatism) and may not be effectively serviceable to weighing the pros and cons of the different courses of actions beforehand (thus making risk engagement likely). Below are some of the pieces of evidences that can be cited from the discussion presented earlier to show these problems among young persons in Ethiopia.

Making decisions without exploring options: Given the existing interdependent culture in Ethiopia, many young persons who migrate to the cities or those in the cities who migrate to street life do not seem to properly exploit the extended social support system before deciding to join street life. In a study conducted on the problem and trends of sexual exploitation of children in selected areas of Nazareth [27], only some were forced to join prostitution as a last resort after trying out other alternatives as domestic servants and daily labourer.

Making decisions without seeing consequences: This was also commonly observed particularly among those migrating to towns, those joining street lives, and those running away from marriage. Evidences suggest that particularly migration to urban areas is not planned but it is rather a leap in the dark [17]. For example, in a study conducted on the problem and trends of sexual exploitation of children in selected areas of Nazareth [27], the majority were migrants from rural areas. Many girls who escape from early marriage and join street life do so without exploring the consequences of their actions. Trying simply to stop unpleasant circumstances surrounding their present life, they rush in to taking actions that would rather add pain to it. One would not expect such children to migrate to urban areas and join street life if they know, as it has been identified in a survey conducted

on the situation of street children in eight major towns of Ethiopia [23], that life in the street is compounded with many problems.

Problems in goal definition: Lack of decision making/problem solving skills and the accompanying risk ventures in which young persons were found engaging themselves in could also be explained in terms of problems in clearly articulated one's sense of purpose and plans.

The tendency to compromise long-term goals for immediate ones as we can see particularly among those young persons who, being under pressure by economic factors, tend to go to street life and work for daily needs totally foreclosing the idea of schooling. In fact, there are others with similar problems and background who side by side manage both work and schooling.

Some students with secondary school education or even less who, seemingly looking for a white-collar job, remain unemployed and yet avoid manual jobs for which there is, however, an increasing demand in this country today.

Attempts, on the other hand, among some of these young persons to travel abroad yet, in many cases, to engage in these same jobs but paying large sum of money for visas (while the same money would have still been used as a seed-money to initiate self-employing jobs).

The dependency syndrome problem seen among youth in institutional childcare centers [56].

The majority of those street children in selected areas of Nazareth who, according to one research [27], were found setting goals too high to achieve even under normal circumstances.

It should be noted here that making inappropriate decisions of the above sort would obviously predispose to a host of other problems. The following evidences, on the other hand, suggest further that young persons would still have difficulties in managing the problems encountered subsequent to their engagements in the different course of actions. Major among the inappropriate problem solving behaviors observed were the way young persons deal with livelihood problems. We commonly observe that prevailing poverty in the country is accompanied with high rate of unemployment among the young; which in turn was accompanied with many inappropriate coping:

Loss of hope: Some people have commented that the greatest epidemic among young people is the epidemic of loss of hope. Very large numbers of young people have little hope of improving the circumstances in which they live and little faith in their own ability to confront the hostile environment.

Many who refuse engaging in ordinary jobs in their surrounding do, however, engage in the same jobs when changing residences like, for example, moving abroad.

In the same way, girls who engage in prostitution do so by moving to very distant places-very far from homeland where they could somehow get some protection- and disguising themselves including their names; thus increasing their own victimizations

Drug use and even drug trafficking: It was found out that the majority of drug traffickers (cannabis) were the unemployed youth [34,35].

In a survey conducted on the situation of street children in eight major towns of Ethiopia [23], a sizeable proportion were found to abuse drugs, drink alcohol, and use cigarette; a greater number of the girl children engaged in prostitution.

Failing in schoolwork is considered as failure in life; as in the case of girls who join prostitution experiencing problems in their schooling. For example, in a baseline study on sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Bahir Dar Town [23], it was found that girls most subject to sexual manipulation were often those academically poor girls or those disinterested in their schooling. In another study, it was found that one of migration of young persons from rural to urban areas is failure in coping school

Other difficulties showing ineffective strategies of self-management are the following:

Emotional problems of young persons (living with parents) leading to suicidal attempts as reported at length earlier;

Abused children engaging in anti-social behaviors and different juvenile crimes as can be seen from the reports of Addis Ababa Police Commission;

Young persons resorting to migration and street life as a solution to present problems but end up increasing their victimization;

AIDS orphans (like for example those in Wereda 25 of Addis Ababa) [57], who were found displaying, among others, such serious negative feelings as grief and anxiety implying ineffective coping in place (FSCE, 2002).

In fact, it was found in one study conducted on the problem and trends of sexual exploitation of children in selected areas of Nazareth) [27] that the majority of child prostitutes, and adolescents coming from rural areas showed positive aspiration to get out of the problem but this aspiration was developed simply for self-convincing purposes rather than real aspirations to terminate the problem. This is because these young persons were not observed engaging in some kind of planned acts (such as for example making some savings from the little coins they earned from their customers) that would eventually help them to be able to withdraw themselves from the act. Their aspirations were rather found to capitalize on unrealistic expectations: that many of them indicated that they hope to terminate their prostitution and street life if they entertain favourable environment; expecting the environment predisposing them to these lives now to helping them get out of it. Many of these children were found to cope with their frustration by setting goals too high to achieve even under normal circumstances. For example, while expressing their future aspirations, most children wish high profile occupations such as becoming medical doctors, merchants, teachers, and football players. Yet, significant proportion was out-of school. Surprising again is that many were not interested to reunite with their families due to the poor economic state of their parents, for fear of violence at home [28], and sense of incompatibility with the home environment.

In sum, putting up all the evidences presented at some length above, we would generally say young people in Ethiopia seem to have different kinds of intrapersonal problems and, therefore, need personal skill to effectively manage these problems. Personal skills are the first and core life skills categories that generally enable young persons to have a successful transition to adulthood by effectively managing the present self. They involve building effective, healthy, and positive personal (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, material and related other) resources.

Included under these personal skills are the following three major groups of skills that in turn have their own sub categories: Cognitive skills, socio-cognitive-emotional skills, and personal resource management skills.

Cognitive skills

decision making, problem solving, critical thinking: All our engagements in life, ranging from the simplest act of getting seated to read this material up to the most complex task (of, say for example, making choices among equally attractive or repulsive goals) are imbued with making decisions.

Cognitive skills are generally the skills that affect the intellect: enable mind take the lead, and thereby make humans more purposive, objective and rational. They help us become conscious, informed than casual; self-restrained, self-directing than instinctual, impulsive; a thinker than a believer, a conventionalist; analytical, reflective, critical than gullible; systematic, organized, planner than haphazard, disorganized, emotional; empiricist than biased; realistic, pragmatic than idealist; flexible than rigid; broad-minded, far-sighted than narrow-minded; independent than conformist.

More specifically, they help young persons become effective decision makers and problem solvers) by enabling them learn to think about problem situations (critically, exhaustively, systematically, and analytically) before actions (to make effective and timely decisions, plans and strategies to effect these decisions, and thereby reduce risk taking), during actions and after actions (to solve problems, make necessary adjustments in the decisions and strategies).

Fundamental in developing these effective cognitive skills (decision making, problem solving) is, therefore, what we may call "critical thinking". Critical thinking is much different from factual knowledge we are exposed to in the course of education. It requires doing more than just memorize or passively absorb new information. It involves grasping the deeper meaning of problems, keeping a different approach and perspectives, thinking reflectively rather than accepting statements without significant understanding and evaluation as in, for example, the following activities:

Analyzing peer, media, cultural, etc influences in making one's decisions

Analyzing attitudes, values, social norms and beliefs and factors affecting decisions

Identifying relevant information and information sources

Parkins and Tishman suggest cognitive skill training aiming to develop critical thinking in making decisions and solving problems involves building the following specific skills [58]:

Open-mindedness: getting to avoid narrow thinking and exploring options.

Intellectual curiosity: wondering, probing, and questioning and also recognizing problems and inconsistencies.

Planning and strategy: Developing plans, setting goals, finding direction, and seeking outcomes.

Intellectual carefulness: Checking for inaccuracy and errors, to be precise, and to be organized.

We believe that decision-making would be a more generic term for our purpose to include the other two (critical thinking, problem solving) cognitive skills). Accordingly, we suggest that cognitive skills central for improving critical decision-making, thus requiring to be included in the LST program for young people in Ethiopia, are:

Skills for problem definition

Analysis skills (to identify the different alternatives, courses of actions and solutions to problems)

Information gathering skills

Evaluation skills (to critically examine future consequences of present actions for self and others, critically assess alternative solutions to problems; determine the influence of values and attitudes of self and others on motivation, decisions...)

Risk assessment skills

Reflective thinking skills (to critically look in to the past, take lessons from it, and rethink about future moves)

Finally, in order to understand how useful and cross cutting these skills are with others, we may consider one intervention training that was designed to teaching Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving (ICPS) skills to children at a young age so that children can learn to reduce and prevent negative, inhibited, and impulsive behaviors (Shure and Spivack cited in Santrock, 1999) [58]. The skills targeted were ability to generate alternative solutions to an interpersonal problem and ability to conceptualize the consequences of different behaviors. Methods used to teach these skills were solving hypothetical dilemmas, thinking aloud, role-playing, and providing performance feedback. Research done with preschool and kindergarten children found that those receiving the ICPS training became better able to cope with typical everyday problems than those who did not. By learning to consider more solutions and consequences, they became better able to cope with frustration, better able to wait, and less overemotional and aggressive when goals could not be satisfied immediately. Thus, problem solving, especially as applied to social or interpersonal situations, and starting early in life, is a critical part of life skills programs.

Socio-cognitive-emotional skills

Self-regulation skills: As effective problem solvers, we obviously begin considering the problem situation (critically, systematically, and exhaustibly) along with plans/strategies governing our action. Once we prepare the mental blueprint of our action, we then act and consistently as per this blueprint; engaging simultaneously in self-monitoring our movement so as to make necessary (cognitive, social, behavioral, emotional) adjustments towards an ultimate solution of the problem at hand. Socio-cognitive-emotional skills are, therefore, highly intertwined groups of personal skills that help us exercise control on all aspects of our movements towards goal achievement, problem solving, or decision-making.

The socio-cognitive-emotional domains of psychological functioning, therefore, encompass our subjective and behavioral experiences in a manner that each domain directly shapes another to an extent they elements can hardly be considered in isolation. The subjective experiences encompass cognitions (beliefs, attributions, interpretations, perceptions) and feelings (attitudes, motivations, interests, values, preferences) about the self, others, and situations. Behavioral dimensions refer to outward expressions or responses (e.g. fight-flight or confrontation-avoidance responses to a threat) made to cope with situations. A single, perhaps more convenient, term that would appropriately represent these groups of skills is "self-regulation". We shall use this generic term here and address other possible sub categories with in it. Different names are used to represent self-regulation: cognitive-monitoring, hyper-cognition, social-cognition, self-monitoring, self-control, self-management, etc. Although there are

some slight differences associated to the use of some of these terms, all of them share certain fundamental similarities that our present LST program needs to adequately address. That is, all of them refer principally to internal skills that regulate our actions (helping us avoiding risk or pursuing risk-free ones), thinking (check out accuracy of facts, beliefs, our responses...), feelings (helping us properly manage our feelings, cope effectively with problems, challenges), and resources to ultimately reach a goal.

Research investigations show that self-regulation is directly linked to a number of factors that need to be addressed so as to effectively develop self-regulation. In fact, according to Bandura's [59] social learning theory, people who experience developmental difficulties are those who are less able to set appropriate goals and to generate ways of achieving those goals. This implies then that self-regulation is directly affected by goal setting. Empirical evidences have explicitly shown that when individuals set clear goals, they get guided to plan how to reach those goals. Goals help individuals to reach their dreams, increase their self-control, and maintain interest [60]. More specifically, research done to predicting academic success have found that high-achieving students often engage in self-regulatory activities such as setting specific learning goals, self-monitoring their learning, and systematically evaluating their progress toward a goal (Zimmerman, et al. cited in Steinberg, 1993) [60].

When it comes to predicting success, research has also shown that these skills are still directly linked to a variety of other factors. For example, it was found that adolescents who believe that ability is malleable (rather than fixed); who are motivated by intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) rewards and delay gratification of their needs; who are confident about their abilities; and who attribute their successes and failures to effort (rather than to ability or lack) achieve more in schools [60]. Keeping these evidences in view, we would safely argue then that the following sub skill categories are central to improving self-regulation and, therefore, need to be included in the LST framework.

Skills for improving self-views: Self-analysis skills (to develop self-awareness about strengths, limitations including learning about extent and type of one's vulnerability to risk, if any), skills for building positive self-concept (reduce one's risk, build self-confidence and self-regard), skills for locus of control, skills for building personal life goals (skills that help young persons learn to set goals that are challenging, reasonable, and specific; develop both long-term and short-term goals; become a systematic planner, learn to live life one day at a time or make commitments in bite-size chunks).

Skills for managing feelings: Managing positive feelings (developing curiosity, optimism), skills for managing negative feelings (anger, fear, anxiety management skills) including stress-reduction and self-relaxation skills.

Skills for regulating needs (skills for delaying gratification of needs).

Personal resources management skills

Resources are the wealth we mobilize towards a certain end. They determine the efforts we need to make, the strategies we need to employ, and even the kinds of goals that we aspire ahead. How effectively we mobilize our resources determine to a large extent how well we are heading towards and achieving our goals. Resources may include our intellectual, emotional, material, and such other non-material endowments of ours as time. The importance of building young persons' intellectual and emotional management skills is already

discussed above. Of particular importance here are skills for managing one's material resources and time.

It has been repeatedly shown that Ethiopia is a poverty-stricken country. Obviously, this poverty is explained not only in terms of low income but also in terms of habits that duly affect the judicious use of the meager available resources. Experience shows that the existing values in Ethiopia seem to discourage saving the available meager resources and delay of gratification in different ways. In fact, "time" is not even valued as a resource in the first place. It seems that time is perceived as indefinite, continuous, and inexhaustible. Among the reasons justifying the need to include these skills are then that Ethiopia is a country with scarcity of resources; that the existing cultures of the different nations and nationalities hardly seem to encourage, if not discourage, judicious use of these scarce resources; that experience shows, as expected, that many young persons (about 85%) do seem to lack skills for saving, delaying needs, and, yet that many young persons and children (about 85%) in Ethiopia are engaged in some kind of income generating and household labor [26] implying that they need to learn to effectively use their earnings, properties, materials and tools, and their time. The LST program for young persons in Ethiopia is suggested to include three sub skill areas that ultimately build their resource management skills: Financial saving skills particularly for young persons who are involved in different kinds of income generating activities, skills for judicious use of properties, and time management skills.

Level II: Interpersonal Skills

As indicated above, cognitive, socio-cognitive-emotional, and resource management skills are intrapersonal skills in the sense that they somehow reside within individuals. As humans are involved in a continuous process of interactions with others, these intrapersonal skills definitely structure our general patterns of interactions with the outside world but are in themselves far from adequate to improve young persons' interaction with others. The interpersonal skills are the skills deployed as we avail ourselves for life with other individuals.

Included under these skills are the following sub categories communication skills and interdependence skill.

Communication skills

We may conveniently present our justification for including communication skills in our LST program by summarizing evidences in to the following themes: Difficulties resisting peer influences, difficulties of self-assertion in interpersonal communication, problems observed in interpersonal conflict management, and negotiation difficulties.

Peer influences: This was observed in a number of instances including age of initiation to some risky life. That is, age of initiation to street life, early sexual experience, early initiation of alcohol and drug use and smoking behaviors reported earlier were found to correspond to the age in which peers begin to assume greater roles in exerting influences on young persons. In fact, some investigations have explicitly identified the vulnerability of young persons to undesirable peer influences. For example, in one joint research [24], peer influence was the second most prevalent reason for joining street life, next to poverty. Moreover, in a survey conducted on the situation of street children in eight major towns of Ethiopia [27], peer influence was one of the major factors leading to street life.

Non-assertiveness: In a culture where silence, obedience, and conformity are virtues and are commonly regarded as signs of decency, one would expect non-assertiveness (particularly in girls) to be a common source of concern, if not a problem. Many instances can also be cited from previous research portraying how young persons put themselves in to troubles because of not saying "no"; when in fact this should be the case:

Getting in to different kinds of risky behaviors, particularly drug and alcohol use, could possibly be out of a desire either to please or to meet demands of their peers

Some research findings even indicate the worst forms of non-assertiveness in which children and young persons either never want to report even when they are abused or else when they do they stay hesitant for long until such time comes that reporting would serve no purpose because such delayed reports make it very difficult for health workers and police to get information about the abuse adequate enough to establish a case in the court [61].

A study on child prostitutes also indicated that shy/timid girls were more likely to be exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation [23].

Problems in managing interpersonal conflicts; Problems in conflict resolution were observed in the following instances

Many children resorting to suicidal attempt because of disputes at home as we can see in the number evidences summarized and presented in our previous discussion under "emotional problems of young persons in Ethiopia."

In a study conducted on the situation of street children in eight major towns of Ethiopia conflict with parents and family disharmony was identified as a major factor leading to street life leading to street life [23].

Family disharmony was one common factor, next to poverty, pushing children to streets as per a joint research conducted on street children in four selected towns of Ethiopia by MoLSA, UNICEF and UCCI [24].

Child offences compiled by Addis Ababa Police Commission and FSCE from April to December 2004 [42] indicated that violence, fights and other in appropriate conflict resolving mechanisms were the most frequent offences registered.

Negotiation difficulties: Difficulties negotiating about one's needs, positions, and rights were other problems observed particularly among young girls who were forced in to early marriage, and thereafter fleeing from it by migrating to towns.

Ethiopia being a society with group interests presiding over individual ones, young persons are obviously expected to conform than assert themselves in many situations. They are as such subjected to a number of (group, social, parental) pressures and influences over which they have little bargaining power to exercise because these influences are cultural and hence young persons are rather expected to conform. Under these circumstances, they need at least to negotiate so as to optimize their own benefits by selecting the lesser evil from two evils. This is particularly the case of early marriage. Young girls may not assertively say "no" but negotiate with parents (about time, the partner to marry etc) or if not, with husbands (about delaying pregnancy somehow, pursuing schooling...). In fact, they can maximize their bargaining power by appealing to those persons whose voices are heard in the community like, for example, religious leaders

and elderly people. But, this does not seem happening in many cases; yet suggesting lack in help seeking skill. Young girls seem either to conform to expectations and accept the arranged marriage and live in it with all the discomforts and sacrifices; or attempt to escape from it by migrating to the unknown dark (towns) only to substitute one evil (even more evil) for another.

We may broadly classify these skills in to an array of three broader groups: communication skills, and interdependence skills, situation management skills. Accordingly, we suggest the following categories to be included in our LST program to build communication skills for young persons in Ethiopia

Verbal/nonverbal communication skills (for active listening-speaking, expressing feelings, giving and receiving feedback...).

Assertive (verbal and non-verbal) communication skills, peer pressure resistance skills.

Conflict resolution, perspective taking and negotiation skills (to enable young persons, among others, optimize their bargaining power in communication).

Interdependence skills

Human existence is imbued mainly with connectedness and interdependence in as much as it embodies our built in desire for independence, at the same time. This web of interdependence entails that human beings engage in a network of existence where by the life of one person depends, either for good or bad, on another and in many ways. Human development requires an optimal use of the benefits of interdependence and subduing its undesirable effects. This is possible when intervention is made at the appropriate stage. Accordingly, adolescence is a critical period in the development of prosocial behaviors (empathy, caring for others...) because there are important advances in the precursors of these behaviors: attainments of multiple perspective and role taking abilities. In fact, research evidences support the importance of encouraging development through cooperation in a period of development where establishing identity becomes a center of gravity because, unlike cooperation, social comparison and competition, particularly during adolescence, tend to leave the young persons in an ego-involved, threatening, self-focused state rather than in a task-involved, effortful, strategy-focused state.

Development of skills for interdependence may even assume more importance particularly for those young persons who live in collectivist societies like Ethiopia where the life of individuals is much more intertwined and cultural values give credence to cooperation than competition; but there are today increasing challenges at the same time against such values implying a mishmash of orientation that would leave young persons in confusion at the very time identity development is the requisite skill for the stage. Furthermore, given that cultural, social, economic and other external factors are equally detrimental, if not more, in the life of individuals in Ethiopia, learning skills for making collective responses would in many cases be more empowering to young people in dealing with developmental challenges in addition to individual skills.

Basic skill categories to be included in the LST program so as to build proper and desirable skills encompass empathy skills, and skills for help seeking skills, and help giving. We may need to ask why these skills (particularly help seeking) are included while they are not commonly seen in other life skills training programs. First and foremost, it appears that proper help seeking skills help to effectively

exploit the existing stock of social capital in Ethiopia that is at the disposal of the growing persons. Skills for extracting support from the extended family is particularly useful for those young persons who-either migrating from or just moving away from home- join street life because of poverty. Help seeking skill also helps to avoid the prevailing vegetative type of help seeking (i.e. "begging") which can hardly do anything good except giving bad lessons, unduly exploiting, and draining the social capital that would have been mobilized rather for purposes that are critically important for development and independence. In the same way, interdependent life entails that one should offer help in as much as he/she is helped including learning to share material and non-material resources which are within the reach of each and every young person. Hence, young persons need to develop a help giving skill in any of its forms including, but not limited to, providing emotional support to others in distress; as in, for example, standing by the side of a girl met on the street being physically abused by a gang; rather than being a bystander.

Level III: Group Skills

Young persons interact not only as individual persons and with individuals alone. Rather, they in many case, act as a group and group members, as well particularly during adolescence. Groups are set of individuals organized (formally or informally, intentionally or unintentionally, permanently or temporarily) on the basis of similarities (of sex, age, grade, race, religion, interest, physical characteristics...), physical proximity, or other criteria for a certain purpose. The groupings can be objectively observable or can be subjectively assumed and less behaviourally evident. In either of the cases, we may generally say that the group to which the person is a member is "with in-group", and the group to which one is excluded because of inclusion in this group is the "out-group". For instance, in terms of "sex", a male adolescent belongs to a group of males (with in group) and female groupings become an out-group for him. Accordingly, individuals naturally interact both in the with-in groups and out-groups. Hence, young persons need to develop effective skills for both.

With-in group skills: skills for teamwork

Help seeking and giving skills can be serviceable in a more global level than those of interpersonal relationships described above. This is what we may call "cooperation or teamwork skills". Skills for cooperation and teamwork are of particular importance to young people in Ethiopia because many of the problems are the making of factors outside the individual. Teamwork and cooperation to work for a common goal requires certain requisite skills, behaviors, and attitudes. Below are some of the desirable skills to be developed and the undesirable ones to be avoided

Establishment: knowing exactly when, why, how, and with whom... to team up

Goals, wishes: Subdue personal wishes and identify with the common goals.

Role definitions: Making fair division of labor and based on agreed upon principles of the group; preparing plans and ground rules.

Commitment: Taking charge of one's role seriously.

Interdependence: Avoid either excessive dependency/invisibility on others or working in isolation from others; need for exchanging information, keeping track of the progress of one another, appreciating

the contributions of, encouraging, and giving feedbacks to one another; avoid singling out one individual as an agent for success or failure

Proper support: Avoid helping others to show that you are able but help to facilitate performance of the teamwork; help others not to make them dependent on you but to make them self-sufficient; avoid excessive interference trying to help but support others only when needed or invited; avoid perceiving the support given as a favour to be paid back; or feeling that one is supported for being weak or supporting for being stronger-everybody helps in some way and gets helped in another way.

Out-group skills

While belonging to a certain group, it is possible that individuals would develop positive and favourable attitudes, and relationships with the with-in group members and the opposite thinking, feeling and actions against the out-group members. In many cases, the with-in groups assuming greater number of members become the majority and the out-group becomes the minority. Under these conditions, the majority becomes the dictate and the rule-maker with all its treatments of the out-group taking some legitimacy. The problem is that such treatments are usually negative and imbued with stigmatizing and discriminating tendencies, particularly against women and girls [62], street children [24], institution-reared children [56] orphaned and vulnerable children in general and those orphaned by AIDS in particular, and children with special needs [63]. Hence, young persons need to develop skills that would help them live effectively with the out-groups. Some of the skills required to build effective out-group interaction include tolerance, open-mindedness, and critical thinking.

Level IV: Socio-Ecosystem Adaptive Skills

The general socio-ecosystem (culture, laws, economy, physical environment...) of the young persons affects them not only by extending indirect effect on their interaction with others. It also poses a more potent direct bearing on their life. Hence, in order to live in this socio-ecosystem, young persons need to develop general adaptive skills that would enable them effectively manage the socio-ecosystem through building skills that would enable managing situations to cope with the anticipated and inevitable negative impacts of the ecosystem on oneself-situation management skill, and moving away from personal interests and assume a more responsible behavior towards the socio-ecosystem skills.

Situation management skills

Effectiveness of our dealings with the socio-ecosystem requires building other skills that help in properly managing the contexts that serve as a platform for expressing our improved internal skills. In a way, these skills are foundational tools that smoothen individual-environment interaction and thereby benefit both parties and in sustainable ways. In this connection, young persons appear to lack skills that would help them effectively deal with certain context-generated and seemingly non-avoidable problems by learning to manage relevant situations that will reduce, at least in the long run, the probability of occurrence of such problems. That is, as repeatedly indicated at different places of our discussions so far, many problems predisposing young persons in Ethiopia are external and beyond the control of individuals (social, cultural, or economic...); thus requiring either a collective rather than individual responses, or early

recognition of these problems and making long-term preparation to avert them, or preferable both. However, failure in appreciating these kinds of problems or not reading early signals of upcoming dangers and generally feeling unusually safe in an environment that is rather unsafe, being unprepared for such inevitable problems or making inadequate preparations (e.g. making individual responses for non-individual problems) could in general be some of the major factors explaining the vulnerability of young persons in Ethiopia. For example, given the existing cultural and social setup in the country, assertive behavior and negotiation may not protect the young persons and hence some would more likely be predisposed to certain kinds of abuses like, for example, early marriage, abduction, rape etc. We may also say that given the existing poverty, the chances of being unemployed are likely for many youth. These and related other inevitable unfortunate happenings could be reduced or somehow overcome if young persons poses other important skills that would help them to anticipate these and related other problems well ahead of time and accordingly learn in good time to effectively manage situations making the occurrences of these problems less likely.

Such young persons need to develop an understanding that their environment is not safe, that something would happen to them sometime in their life somewhere, and that they need to protect themselves from the problem in good time. This self-prevention venture involves, for example, reading early signals of factors predisposing many young persons to dangers/problems and getting engaged in a long-term preparation to reduce the impacts. For example, one type of long-term preparation is building a back up support group in good time that could be deployed for assistance during the occurrence of a distressing situation. Such group, if available, could be more intimate, affectionate, caring and supporting than what the peers and friends normally do. It could be a social, psychological, and material source of support as we normally observe happening in such adult social groups as Idir and Mahiber in adults.

In general, situation management skills are basically meant to address issues of person-environment interaction in which the latter concept (i.e. "environment") is used here in a little wider sense of encompassing the general contexts of development (culture, economy...) that put structural limits on individuals and the skills the young persons need to acquire so that they will be able to transcend these limits. Suggested sub skill categories for inclusion in the LST program to build situation management skills may include skills for discerning general risk factors (in one's culture, economy, politics...), setting general protective life style, and building back up social support group and for mobilizing it in the face of such adversaries.

Societal skills

Many of the skills discussed in life skills programs are by and large focused on individual persons per se. That is, emphasis is generally put on kinds of skills the individuals need to acquire for healthy transition in to adulthood. But, in societies (like Ethiopia) having a tone of interdependent life style, and, more importantly, with a preponderance of youth and youth-dominated population, responsibilities are much more spoken than individual rights; implying the need for building young persons' skills to effectively discharge these responsibilities. In fact, the different national policies of Ethiopia give credence to the importance of developing these general responsibility skills from early in life. For instance, the Youth Policy conspicuously acknowledges that young persons' assumption of societal responsibilities is a means of ensuring social participation, on the one hand, and ultimately

promoting their development, on the other. The cultural policy still underscores the responsibility of young persons to develop the culture of their nations/nationalities including the responsibility to work towards eradicating harmful traditional practices. The Education and Training Policy also states that one of the major objectives of education in Ethiopia is to prepare young persons who have the ability, willingness, and sensitivity to address societal problems. Above and beyond cultural and policy expectations, young persons themselves do have the developmental needs and capacities for resumption of responsibilities of one kind or another. The history of Ethiopian youth, briefly summarized in the previous discussions, portrays that the concern, willpower, and commitment that young Ethiopians have is so immense that it can go to the extent of scarifying their own life to the well-being and development of their nation. Of course, although the contributions made were significant enough to shape the course of history of this country, these contributions were imbued at times with some negative outcomes because of lack of opportunities and skills for proper participation.

We can also cite here the comprehensive youth participation organized by UNHCR-Ethiopia to understand the issue better. Few years back, UNHCR- Ethiopia had initiated the idea of supporting the refugee youth by making these young persons support their community. In a manner to complement its CRC-derivative vulnerability-based child protection policy with a more positive and potential-based system of support, UNHCR-Ethiopia took pilot initiatives to organize some refugee adolescents and youth in to Roots and Shoots Clubs so that, as per the goals and principles of the Roots and Shoots International, they would be able to develop responsible behavior through participation in cost-effective community resource-based care and support for physical/or natural environment (environmental sanitation, soil conservation, tree planting...), domestic animals (protecting abuse, practicing breeding...) and wild animals (protecting them from migration by protecting their environment, controlling hunting...), and human beings (e.g. constructing environment-friendly houses for the elderly, persons with disabilities, women, orphaned and unaccompanied children...). The approach is that they first learn the skills, create demonstration sites to show to the members of the refugee community, use these sites to educate about harmful and better practices, bring about attitudinal changes, and ultimately mobilize their community for wider intervention.

Evidences obtained during preliminary assessments [64] seem to show that these pilot initiatives have indeed made remarkable positive impacts on the club members, their communities, and on the environment. It was learnt that these impacts would also have sustainability value because the research participants unanimously suggested that they would continue doing the same in their homeland after repatriation. Very much appreciative of these initiatives and the contributions they have made to the refuge youth, community, and environment, program leaders suggested that extending such initiatives to non-refugee settings would also make a far-reaching contribution. Given that Ethiopia is an agrarian society whose stock of physical, natural, and human capital are increasingly under pressure today, as evidently seen, for example, in the growing concern of the country for environmental degradation, unwise use of the stock of animal resources and the existing social crisis leaving money persons without care and support (e.g. the elderly, AIDS-orphaned young children...), it is of much use to build the skills of the young persons at least for a better tomorrow, if not today. It should be noted here that building this responsibility skill does not necessarily require club

formation. The approaches can rather be customized to fit into the structure of LST program.

In general, appreciative of the different rights young persons need to be granted to protect them from harm, we may say that it still appears, however, of greater importance to enable this group learn to assume certain responsibilities because it has a number of benefits. First, this orientation is a potential based-approach because it considers young persons as agents of their own change and that of the environment surrounding them. Second, it entails the possibility of reaping dual benefits, at least in the long run, because the beneficiaries of this participatory act are both young persons themselves and their nation. Third, this in turn implies efficient use of the energy, capacity, and optimism of young persons that, otherwise, would be wasted, and, fourth, given that Ethiopia is a population of young persons, it can't afford to miss this opportunity. For this purpose, the LST program for young people in Ethiopia may target building general responsibility skills that include intermediation skills to act as a mediator to bring to terms significant other persons who are in conflict (i.e. friends, family members...), advocacy skills to avert malpractices in the surrounding harming others (persons, groups, communities, environment, animals...) such as, for example, stigma and discrimination (based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability, HIV/AIDS...), and personal skills for non-personal cause (skills to take personal intervention to improve environmental hygiene...).

Conclusions

Adolescence is a stage of development in which remarkable changes occur while transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Life skills are important tools directing these changes towards a successful end. Research evidences have shown that life skills training can make significant contribution promoting development and protecting risk factors. Experiences and research on young person in Ethiopia show that there are lots of risk factors compromising development. Hence, to empower young persons to manage these risk factors and promote healthy developmental outcomes, it becomes of paramount importance to provide opportunities for LST. In fact, LST was introduced in Ethiopia as a tool to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS some years ago and there are lots of organizations claiming to provide LST in their own ways. Narrow definition of LST, lack of consensus in conceptualizing life skills, and absence of collaborative exercises among stakeholders were common problems in LST programming in Ethiopia. All organizations have their own guidelines and manuals of LST that is imported from outside. These LST efforts can bear fruits only if they are planted in the Ethiopian soil. The meaning, goals and contents of LST need to be structured (above and beyond developmental needs, theoretical positions and universal principles) by contextual (social, cultural, and economic) factors that shape the developmental profile of young persons. Review of available research suggests that there are a number of concerns that, on the one hand, justify the need for providing LST in Ethiopia and, on the other hand, define the essence of LST (meaning, goals, and contents) provision.

Given the Ethiopian reality at present, life skills can be considered as a training (rather than education) approach (than a content) for young persons (aged 10 to 24 years) that addresses the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains (or simply, knowledge, attitudes/values, and skills) necessary for personal growth, interpersonal living and building skills necessary for promoting social/group or societal development holistically. Its major goals are to enable young persons manage their own development (for program attendants), enable them influence the

life of significant others (for Program attendants' immediate associates), reduce the prevalence of risky behaviors (violence, HIV/AIDS infection, unwise use of resources...in the local communities), and expand, sustain, and eventually institutionalize itself in the areas that are targeted for delivery in general.

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