The Life Skills Assessment Scale: Measuring life skills of disadvantaged children in the developing world

#gLocalEval19

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About Dream a Dream

• 19 year track record in Life Skills interventions presently delivered through multiple strategies
• 10,000 young people in Direct Delivery programmes (After School Life Skills & Career Connect Programmes) year-on-year
• Over 7700 teachers engaged since 2012 in 5 states & 19 districts impacting 192,500 young people in the Teacher Development Programme
• Focus on Girls – 49% participation across programmes
• 97 member team. 43 Lead Facilitators. 2 member Leadership team. 5 member board.
• Recognized and Awarded for Innovation, Transparency and Accountability over the years by Ashoka, GDN, Harvard, Rockefeller Foundation, Resource Alliance and others
• Developed a standardized impact assessment scale for Life Skills – Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale – to measure life skills
• Delivered programmes in 5 states and Delhi through 163 partners - Urban, Semi-Urban and Rural
• Scaled our work to Kenya in partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation
Why we Exist

To empower young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast changing world, using a creative life skills approach.
Why do we need a new scale?
Understanding the Challenge

- Lack of Love and Care
- Abuse
- Violence
- Rejection / Abandonment
- Orphaned
- Extreme poverty
- Malnutrition

- Mobility
- Diversity
- Complexity
- Unpredictability
- Knowledge and Skill Gap
- Urbanization/Migration
- Industrialization

75% of youth entering the workforce every year considered unemployable or not job-ready. CII, India Skills Report 2015 (November, 2014)

- 90% labor force in informal jobs
- Only 15% enrolment in college
- 53% dropouts from Grade 1 to Grade 10
Failure to thrive - stunting

*Describes a situation where a child does not grow as expected on a growth chart (that is following the pattern – not just tall or short)*
Understanding Failure To Thrive
FAILURE TO THRIVE - STUNTING

Describes a situation where a child does not grow as expected on a growth chart (that is following the pattern – not just tall or short)

Photo: WaterAid/ Ronny Sen
Children who fail to thrive commonly also have a basket of other problems

- Poor cognitive skills (inc information processing, memory etc)
- Poor relationship skills, attachment problems
- Poor maturity
- High anxiety
- Poor emotional skills
These problems appear in everyday life as life-skills problems
This situation can be thought of as:

when growth stops or slows, development also stops or slows

This is why our disadvantaged children are a special group.
Research has shown that:

these cognitive deficits can be recoverable

problems/cognitive deficits can diminish over time for children who have failed to thrive
Scale Development
How to measure cloth
A good ruler is reliable

• Should give the same length every time it's used (Test-retest)
• Should give the same length when I use it as when you use it (Inter-rater)
A good ruler discriminates

Should tell the difference between a long and a short piece of cloth
(Discriminant Validity)
Every inch matters

- Each inch should contribute to the ruler: if I take an inch away from a ruler, that should make a difference (Internal Reliability)
First Steps

• Literature review
  – to set the context
  – chose the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) definition of life skills as a globally influential framework.
Definition of Life Skills

World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines Life Skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”
World Health Organization, 1997

- decision making
- problem solving
- creative thinking
- critical thinking
- effective communication
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- self-awareness
- empathy
- coping with emotions
- coping with stress
Focus groups

• Summary of the literature review and WHO definitions

• Presented to focus groups in India made up of:
  – 6 teachers from local schools for disadvantaged children
  – 4 NGO workers
  – 3 volunteers working with disadvantaged children
  – 2 young people with disadvantaged backgrounds.
Developing scale items

• Focus groups considered operationalizability of the WHO life skills

• and also practical skills
  – needed for success in work environments such as retail work, service industries, small businesses, and NGO work
Developing scale items

• then produced some items describing behaviour that could be answered
• by observers rating children and young people involved in life skills programmes
Developing scale items

• Members of the focus groups observed young people (6-18 years) during NGO programme participation

• and attempted to rate the age-appropriate life skill level (1-5)
  – 1=‘does not yet do’
  – 5=‘does independently’
Developing scale items

- five observable behavioral skills appeared appropriate and feasible,
  - interacting with others
  - overcoming difficulties and solving problems
  - taking initiative
  - managing conflict
  - understanding and following instructions
Participants

• Staff / volunteers rated 1,234 children/young people new to Dream A Dream programmes over a period of 13 months
• mean participant age 12 years (min 6.1 years, max 18.3 years, SD 2.7).
• came from disadvantaged backgrounds
  – (slum communities, orphanages, shelters for rescued street children, government schools, NGO-run residential schools, and evening centers for working children.)
Observer Raters

• 11 Dream A Dream staff
  – career NGO workers, some of whom came from disadvantaged backgrounds

• 10 Dream A Dream volunteers
  – Mostly employed in the IT industry in Bengaluru, plus one lawyer and one journalist
Life Skills Assessment Scale (LSAS)

- Interacting with others
- Overcoming difficulties and solving problems
- Taking initiative
- Managing conflict
- Understanding and following instructions
5-point Likert-type scale:

• 1 (does not yet do),
• 2 (does with a lot of help)
• 3 (does with some help)
• 4 (does with a little help)
• 5 (does independently)

After using, the scale scores of 1-5 are allocated and an overall score is calculated as the average (mean) of all five skill scores
**Standardisation**

- Normative data was collected from 1136 young people, in 3 age groups
  - 8-10; 11-13; 14-16 years
- Statistical analyses were conducted for
  - Internal Reliability,
  - Test-retest Reliability,
  - Inter-rater Reliability
  - Discriminant Validity
• The statistical analysis indicates that the scale can be used with confidence.

• It is a reliable and valid measure of life skills
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Who can use it?

• **NGOs** - Give feedback to stakeholders, inform programme strategy and maximise effectiveness
• **Donors** - Make better informed decisions about funding allocation and support
• **Researchers** - Advance the study of Life Skills
• **Clinicians** - Use Life Skills as an outcome measure alongside mental health measures and know it is appropriate for disadvantaged Indian children
• **Programme developers** - Check out programme performance at an early stage
• **Carers** - Keep track of the progress of children in your care
What the life skills assessment scale can do for you?
The LSAS can

Measure the overall performance of programs
N=1905

Baseline Distribution

Endline Distribution

Score

Participants
The LSAS can be used to compare one program with another.
The LSAS can

Help you discover which life skills are improved by which program
The LSAS can help you find out how long a young person needs to attend and how often, to benefit from your programs.
Length of time Engaged

![Bar chart showing length of time engaged]

Average development in life skills across five life stages:

- 1 year: 0.45
- 2 years: 0.7
- 3 years: 0.83

Impact (End line(Avg)-Base line(Avg))
The LSAS can

Give you a life skills profile for each young person
For example: RAVI

scores

- interacting
- overcoming
- initiative
- conflict
- instructions
- overall

(scores)
The LSAS can

Measure individual progress
SUMMARY

- The LSAS is scored by observer rating and has only five items
- It is a very simple and practical assessment tool
- It has multiple uses
- However, it is just a tool, and it must be used intelligently
Useful Links:

LSAS Paper:

Life Skills Assessment Scale:
http://dreamadream.org/reports/LSASForm2019.pdf

Dream a Dream Impact Report -2018-19
THANK YOU

www.dreamadream.org