

Method 6: Children’s Perception of “Life-skills”

Purpose

Everyone has a variety of “life-skills;” that is, knowledge and abilities that allow us to function in society. The more skills we have – and the more mastery we have over them – the greater our capacity is to create and secure our wellbeing.

This Activity helps us:

- Identify the life-skills children see as key to escaping/avoiding poverty
- Critically explore children’s perceptions of formal schooling and its meaning to their future wellbeing

Our major goal is to understand what skills children believe they will need in the future and whether or not they expect these skills to keep them from being poor.

Each Livelihood Team is to conduct this exercise *twice* during the 2nd Round of Fieldwork:

- Once with a group of ten *children* (five boys and five girls), ages 10-11
- Once with a group of *youth* (five boys and five girls), ages 16-17

Process

Step 1: Assemble a group of appropriate participants. If this is done through a school, have all the boys and all the girls write their names on a piece of paper and place them in two (gender split) bags. Then select five names from each to ensure transparent and fair selection.

Step 2: Explain the idea of “life-skills” and ask a participant to provide an example, such as “digging.” (This is an important feedback-mechanism for the facilitator to check whether or not s/he has clearly explained the idea of “life-skills.”)

Step 3: Give the children time to think of some *important* life-skills. They can talk amongst themselves during this period. After about 5 minutes, ask the children to take turns “dramatising” an important life-skill. Those children that are not acting need to guess what their friend is doing (e.g. knowing how to count or washing clothes).

After each child successfully dramatises a life-skill, s/he should draw its symbol (e.g. a book, a piece of clothing or a cooking fire) on the left-hand side of flip-chart paper. Allow the participants to keep adding life-skills to their list until they are satisfied.

Step 4: Have the participants take turns scoring the importance of each life-skill vis-à-vis “poverty.” In other words, ask them to place from 1 (no relevance) to 5 (highest relevance) markers alongside each life-skill symbol on the basis of whether or not mastering it will keep them from being poor when they grow up...

Step 5: Interview the Matrix. Key questions to ask include:

- Do children believe that, if they learn their lessons in school, they will be able to escape/avoid poverty?

- What changes would they recommend making to their curriculum so that it would better prepare them for their future?
- Are children learning all the life-skills they need? If not, why not? Do participants think this is different from in the past?
- How do children learn life-skills that are not taught in school?
- Who teaches orphans the life-skills that parents might ordinarily teach?
- What kind of post-primary school experience (e.g. secondary school or vocational school) would most effectively help young people to escape/avoid becoming poor?

Remember:

- Desegregate (i.e. explore whether the same answers hold true for ALL children, or just some? If the latter, WHICH ONES? HOW SO? WHY?)
- Always ask, “why, why, why?”
- Explore changes over time (i.e. are the skills that boys and girls need to acquire different from the skills their parents needed? If so, which skills are different, why and are children gaining these skills?)