

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of People in Need's Life Skills and Gender Transformation Curriculum

LEARNING BRIEF

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1 Background

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that permit human beings to deal successfully with the needs and demanding situations of life. The life skills approach is based on the premise that opportunities can be created for young people to acquire knowledge and skills that enhance their protective factors; enable them to avoid manipulation by outside influences, and make right decisions in their day to day lives. People in Need (PIN), being aware of the uniquely transformative power of education to act as a catalyst for numerous wider developments, social inclusion, and empowerment goals, is implementing the 'Aarambha' (also known as Leave No Girl Behind-[LNGB]) program which is running from 2018 and ends on 2024, targeting the out-of-school (OOS) adolescent girls of age 10-19 years in Bara and Rautahat districts of Madhesh Province.

The evaluation aimed at exploring the effectiveness of the PIN's life skills and gender transformation curriculum for out of school (OOS) girls in the Bara and Rautahat districts of Madhesh province. It aimed to assess the impact of the curriculum on girls' learning outcomes, their transition to formal education, and their relevance to business development and income generation. Additionally, the study sought to investigate the extent to which the curriculum contributed to women's leadership, confidence, and participation in decision-making. Furthermore, it aimed to understand the role of the curriculum in challenging and reducing harmful socio-cultural practices, increasing knowledge, and promoting positive attitudinal changes among OOS girls.

The evaluation used a mixed method (Qual-Quan) using embedding or nested designs in 12 rural/municipalities of Bara and Rautahat districts. Data collection methods included mixed interviews with OOS adolescent girls, key informant interviews (KIIs) with various stakeholders, and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving OOS girls, in school girls (ISG), and community learning centre (CLC) members. In addition, case studies and observations of CLCs were conducted. Data management and analysis were performed using SPSS for quantitative data and ATLAS.ti for qualitative data. The analysis included descriptive and thematic analyses using the framework analysis method.

2 Lessons Learnt

2.1 Positive Impact on Life Skills Development:

The evaluation revealed that Aarambha's curriculum has had a positive impact on the development of essential life skills among participants. According to the data, life skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution were significantly enhanced in the majority of participants. Nearly 90% of respondents reported improvements in their ability to handle interpersonal conflicts, make informed decisions, and solve daily challenges effectively. This learning indicates the effectiveness of the curriculum in equipping individuals with practical tools to navigate various challenges in their personal and professional lives.

2.2 Empowerment through Gender Transformation:

The curriculum's focus on gender transformation has proven effective in challenging traditional gender norms and promoting gender equality. The evaluation data showed that

participants demonstrated an increased awareness of gender issues and a willingness to challenge harmful stereotypes and practices. Over 85% of respondents expressed a more positive attitude towards gender equality, with many indicating a shift in their perceptions of traditional gender roles. This finding highlights the curriculum's potential to foster positive attitudinal changes towards gender roles and empower individuals to advocate for gender equality.

2.3 Practical Application Enhances Learning Outcomes:

The evaluation emphasized the importance of incorporating practical application into the curriculum. Participants showed greater engagement and retention when they had opportunities to apply their learning in real-life situations. Practical exercises and simulations allowed individuals to internalize the concepts and skills taught, leading to more profound and lasting transformations. Over 95% of respondents mentioned that the hands-on activities helped them better understand and retain the information presented, indicating the efficacy of experiential learning methods.

2.4 Incorporating Contextual Sensitivity is Vital:

The evaluation identified the significance of contextual sensitivity in curriculum design and implementation. Customizing the curriculum to the specific needs and cultural backgrounds of the participants proved essential for its effectiveness. By considering the local context, the curriculum was better received and embraced by the target audience, enhancing its impact. More than 80% of respondents appreciated the curriculum's relevance to their daily lives and cultural context, stating that it made the content more relatable and applicable.

2.5 Monitoring and Follow-up Support are Essential:

The evaluation revealed that ongoing monitoring and follow-up support significantly influenced the sustainability of the curriculum's impact. Participants who received continued support and mentorship demonstrated higher levels of retention and application of learned skills. Nearly 75% of respondents who had access to post-training support reported continued use of the acquired life skills and gender-transformative practices in their daily lives. This finding underscores the importance of establishing long-term support mechanisms to reinforce the curriculum's effects.

2.6 Collaboration with Local Stakeholders Strengthens Impact:

Engaging local stakeholders, such as community leaders, teachers, and parents, in the curriculum implementation proved advantageous. Their support and involvement not only enhanced the credibility of the program but also contributed to its long-term success. The collaboration ensured that the curriculum aligned with community needs and was perceived as a valuable resource. Over 90% of respondents acknowledged the positive influence of community leaders and teachers in promoting the curriculum's acceptance and effectiveness.

2.7 Monitoring and Evaluation as a Continuous Improvement Tool:

The evaluation process itself served as a valuable tool for continuous improvement. Regular monitoring and feedback collection enabled PIN to make necessary adjustments to the curriculum, ensuring its ongoing relevance and effectiveness. This iterative approach allowed the organization to refine its program and maximize its impact over time. The data showed that continuous feedback loops led to several improvements in the curriculum, resulting in higher participant satisfaction and increased positive outcomes over successive program cycles.

3 Best practices

Contextualization and Localization: The project recognized the importance of contextualizing and localizing the curricula to have a better impact on the learning outcomes and reduction of harmful socio-cultural norms. By developing curricula in the local language and focusing on the specific needs and context of the community, the project was able to make the content more relevant and accessible to the participants.

Inclusive Approach: The curricula aimed to be inclusive by considering the needs of various marginalized groups, including females, adolescents, people with disabilities, different castes, and sexual minorities. By ensuring that the training materials and activities were inclusive, the project fostered a more supportive and empowering learning environment for all participants.

Activity-Oriented and Child-Friendly Methods: The project utilized activity-oriented and child-friendly teaching methods to engage the participants effectively. By incorporating interactive and hands-on activities, the curricula made the learning process more enjoyable and comprehensible for the girls, leading to better retention of knowledge and skills.

Involvement of Local Governments and Schools: The project worked collaboratively with local governments and schools to ensure sustainability and ownership of the initiatives. Involving local authorities in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the project facilitated a smoother transition and continuity of the activities even after the project's conclusion.

Emphasis on Life Skills and Empowerment: The project emphasized life skills development and empowerment of OOS girls, aiming to equip them with essential skills and confidence to make informed decisions and pursue their life goals. By focusing on enhancing decision-making abilities, financial management, and leadership skills, the project helped girls become active agents of change in their communities.

Tailored Support for Transitioning to Formal Education and Business: The project provided tailored support to the OOS girls in transitioning to formal education or engaging in income-generating activities. By offering bursary support, skill training, and business development opportunities, the project addressed the economic and educational challenges faced by the girls and contributed to their empowerment.

Collaborative Efforts to Address Social Issues: The project acknowledged that challenging and reducing harmful socio-cultural practices required collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders. By working with local communities, Muslims, and civil society organizations, the project conducted advocacy and awareness programs to address child marriage, the dowry system, substance abuse, and gender-based violence.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The project maintained a structured monitoring and evaluation process to assess the effectiveness of its interventions continually. By collecting feedback through focus group discussions, interviews, observation, and assessments, the project makes necessary improvements and demonstrates the impact of its activities.

4 Impact

The curricula implemented by PIN's Life Skills and Gender Transformation program demonstrated a remarkable impact on OOS girls. A total of 6722 OOS girls enrolled in the CLCs across three cohorts. Among the OOS girls who attended the CLCs, 98% improved their linguistic skills, while 96% showed progress in numeracy skills, achieving average to higher levels of proficiency.

The impact of the curricula was evident as 69.2% of the girls who attended the CLCs later re-enrolled in school, ranging from grades 2 to 9, signifying the positive influence of the program on their educational aspirations. Moreover, the project addressed the economic needs of the girls, providing financial support to economically disadvantaged students to continue their education or start their businesses. These income-generating activities, such as sewing, embroidery, and shop-keeping, not only improved their economic status but also empowered them to challenge prevailing socio-cultural norms.

The curricula's gender transformative program instilled newfound confidence in the OOS girls, enabling them to break free from traditional gender roles and advocate against harmful practices. As a result of the program's impact, many girls gained the courage to reject early marriages and actively participate in decision-making processes at home and in their communities.

Overall, the curricula's systemic impact was evidenced by the significant improvements in linguistic and numeracy skills, the high number of OOS girls re-enrolling in school, and the transformative effect on their social and economic status. These data facts reinforce the program's effectiveness in empowering girls and fostering positive change in the communities it served.

5 Sustainability

The project's systemic sustainability efforts, including active engagement with local governments, fostering ownership, and facilitating the transfer of CLCs, exemplify PIN's commitment to ensuring long-term impact. By addressing harmful socio-cultural practices through advocacy and awareness programs and adopting an inclusive approach in curriculum development, the project establishes a solid foundation for lasting positive transformation and empowerment in the lives of the OOS girls and communities it serves. With these strategic measures, the project aims to create sustainable change that extends well beyond its timeline, leaving a meaningful and enduring impact. A contextual,

comprehensive, activity-based curriculum combined with collaborative engagement and sustainability planning contributed to the effectiveness and positive impact of PIN's Life Skills and Gender Transformation Curriculum.

The evaluation underscores the transformative power of life skills education and gender transition curriculum to improve the lives of OOS girls. By addressing the unique challenges, they face, promoting empowerment and leadership, and promoting an inclusive learning approach, the educational project 'Aarambha' have created positive and lasting impacts on individuals and communities.

"Inspiring a love for learning through an engaging curriculum that ignites curiosity"

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