YOUNG AFRICA

FOR THE EMPOWERMENT
OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFRICA

LIFE SKILLS MANUAL
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A youngster who studied car mechanics could use his skill to repair a vehicle. He could also apply the same knowledge to bypass its security system and steal that car. A young woman who after completing her hairdresser’s course takes a micro-credit to start her own salon, could face family pressure to share her profits. She needs then to stand up for herself to repay her loan. In times of killer diseases as HIV/AIDS, youths need a clear goal to live for so that they actively take measures not to die.

What makes the difference for a young person? The values they live by. The self-confidence to make empowered choices. The responsibility to be part of a better world. That’s exactly the aim of life skills education.

Life skills education forms an essential part of Young Africa’s mission to offer young people integral development: teaching skills of the hand to be self-reliant, skills of heart and mind to live with dignity, skills of the soul to live with purpose. Vocational training plus business skills plus life skills make youths (self-)employable.

This manual is the result of working for and, more importantly, with youths in Africa since 1995. Their experiences have defined the topics covered. Their need for empowerment has inspired the thematic cycle in which the lessons are presented.

Nearly all lessons have been tried, tested, challenged, improved and finally written down. My students have shaped the lessons as much as I, their teacher. Because life skills education does not teach academic knowledge, the students are co-creators of the learning process. The lessons are therefore interactive and invite youngsters to share their views, ideas and experiences.

The 26 lesson programme is offered as a cycle, focussing first on personal growth (ME), covering topics as goal-setting, building self-confidence, taking responsibility and HIV/AIDS. It then shifts to interpersonal development (US), talking about communication, empathy, relationships, sexuality, love, gender and standing up for yourself.

The third part covers issues that create social awareness and to be an agent of change in the world you live in (ALL) with lessons on leadership, human rights, domestic violence, our norms and values, creation of the ideal society, national budget awareness and a simulation game on the impact of war and peace. The cycle is closed returning to personal development (ME) with an interreligious session on God and shaping the future.

The life skills method encompasses four different learning objectives: be, become, know and do. These appeal to the students to look at their qualities and characteristics (BE), to grow or be an agent of change (BECOME), create awareness (KNOW) or are a direct call to action (DO).

Certainly not all the lessons have been designed by me. I have used-with-permission, and slightly adjusted to the African context, the excellent value education books of Felix Koikara SDB and Joe Mannath SDB ‘Live Your Values’, ‘Heal The World’ and ‘Do it. Learn it. Live it’. The lesson ‘Be a winner’ is a youth-oriented adaptation of Habit 1 in Stephen Covey’s ‘Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’. The Global Youth Work Toolkit of our Irish partner organisation SERVE has been a helpful source of information. From other books, manuals and methods on empowerment I have borrowed bits and pieces. All are duly acknowledged in the Bibliography.

I am grateful to all who have contributed to make this manual a tool for youth empowerment: the thousands of students who have participated and sharpened the programme; my Young Africa colleagues who have taught it; volunteers Annette McGroary and Elke Op’t Root for respectively starting and completing un-described lessons; my partner-in-life-and-work Raj A. Joseph for his rich input and never drying-up stream of new ideas.

Gratitude to SERVE for the generous offer of designing and printing this manual. Thanks to the Delegation of the European Commission in Mozambique for financing the translation into Portuguese.

In several evaluations students have told us that the impact of life skills education has been very positive. Employers indicate it contributes to employability of young people. By nature young people have the open minds and creative dynamics to change the world they live in. It’s up to us, educators, to provoke them with new insights and inspire them to be the best they can be. May this manual be a powerful tool to achieve this!

Dorien Beurskens
Executive Director Young Africa
Dondo - Mozambique 2014
Dear Life Skills Educator,

You are going to teach a very powerful, impact-rich programme to your students. Thank you in advance for taking it up.

The manual that lies before you has been compiled with love for our students. It carries the strong conviction our youths are talented and that it is part of our duty to stimulate them to explore and develop these together with them. That requires from you, the facilitator, to truly connect with the youths you are working with.

The lessons are highly interactive. They should be taught in an open atmosphere. They involve work in teams and feedback from the whole group of students. They invite them to express themselves in various ways. It is therefore important that the group size of students is not too big (maximum 40 students per lesson) and the number of youngsters in a team does not go beyond 8. With this number of participants, the average duration of each lesson is approximately 1.5 hours.

This manual is a facilitators’ book. It guides you through the lessons, gives you instructions on how to approach the subject, what teaching method to use, how to start and conclude a subject. It is not meant to be distributed to the students.

At the beginning of each lesson you find the symbol of a light bulb with two words in it: the focus of the topic (ME, US, ALL) and the learning action (BE, BECOME, KNOW, DO). They form a cycle that best be followed in the order in which the lessons are presented in the manual. Most lessons are to be taught by you; for some more sensitive subjects as HIV/AIDS, human rights, domestic violence it makes more sense to invite an organisation specialised in the topic.

Each lesson is built up following the same structure:

- **INSPIRATION**: a mind-opening quotation to introduce the topic; it would be nice to have this written on the board when the students enter the classroom.
- **OBJECTIVES**: for your information only, to understand thoroughly what the students need to learn this particular lesson.
- **MATERIALS REQUIRED**: to help you to prepare. Worksheets, where needed to be printed and copied, are mentioned here. They are inserted right after the lesson.
- **INPUT**: the facilitator gives a theoretical introduction to the lesson, often in dialogue with the group, always engaging the students.
- **ACTIVITY**: the participants get to work with the subject, either in teams or individually; various work forms are being applied as drama, discussions, games, filling in worksheets and more.
- **CONCLUSION**: a way of winding up the lesson and evaluating what has been learned and what the impact could be.
- **AFFIRMATION**: to be read by you and repeated by all students together. (Affirmations are a way of ‘programming the brain’ to internalise a certain value).

I wish you much fulfillment and fun with life skills education. The future of Africa is in the hands of the young of Africa. You play a pivotal role in making that happen.

Dorien Beurskens

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**NOTES FOR ALL USERS**

This manual is designed to empower young people. As many young people as possible! That is why we make the digital version freely available.

We kindly request you to inform YA that you are using this manual emailing to ya.int@youngafrica.org. Could we send you a questionnaire to report back to us on what the impact of your life skills lessons has been? Thank you.
**INSPIRATION**

“You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.”
- Mae West

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To introduce life skills education: what students can expect to learn
2. To get to know you as a facilitator
3. To get to know students by name, as knowing someone’s name is recognizing his/her existence
4. For students to get each other by name
5. To explain the rule of confidentiality in life skills lessons.

**MATERIALS REQUIRED**

- Blackboard & chalk/Board and marker (facilitator)
- Notebook & pen (students)

**INPUT**

Say a word of welcome to the students. Life skills education is most probably a new subject to them so discuss what they could expect to learn. Explain that it’s an interactive programme, where nobody, including the teacher, knows everything and everyone knows something. It’s therefore a sharing session, facilitated by the teacher who offers skills for a better life, hence the name of the course. Because it’s such an important and powerful subject, it’s a compulsory part of the curriculum. And it’s fun!

What students need to bring to the Life Skills lessons are a notebook and a pen.

**ACTIVITY**

Two games are being played to get familiar with the names. Knowing someone’s name is recognizing his/her presence. These games also serve as perfect ice breakers.

1. ‘The name is in the game’: form a wide circle of all students. As a leader, you start. You step forward in the circle, call out your name and at the same time make a funny gesture (e.g. a jump, a pirouette, throw your arms in the air, kneel down, etc).
ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Immediately after you finish, all students repeat your name and copy your gesture. One by one, each student does the same: call out his/her name with a gesture and all other repeat the name and gesture. Continue until you’ve completed the circle.

2. ‘Memory snake’ is played in the same wide circle. In this game, the leader is the last to go. The student on your left says his name. The students next to him repeats number 1’s name and adds his own. Student 3 repeats the name of number 1, number 2 and adds his own. Like this, complete the circle. The list gets longer and longer and the challenge to remember longer. Facilitate this tightly so that it does not get boring. The leader will be the last to finish and remember all the names. Then let all participants change places and ask for volunteers to say again the names of all.

After the games students sit down again. It’s time to get to know more than just each other’s names. We want to know characteristics and qualities of each one. What defines you as a person?

Write on the board 5 x I am: I am...
I am...
I am...
I am...
I am...

Ask students to copy and write after the first I am their names. Explain the exercise by using yourself as an example, completing the other four I am with defining characteristics or qualities. Give them 5 minutes to finish the activity in silence.

In pairs they share what they have written down. When that’s done, each student introduces his partner to the whole group by saying his name and one most significant characteristic. For instance: ‘He is John. He is a football player’.

CONCLUSION

Conclude by thanking the group for opening up and participating in life skills. It’s a journey and all of us in this group travel together. Explain that everyone will be expected to share actively their life experiences and opinions. But for this to succeed, we need a safe environment. Ask all to promise to respect each other and to keep confidential what they hear in the life skills lesson.

AFFIRMATION

My presence matters. The presence of my class mates matter. We respect each other.