



INVESTIGATING SOFT SKILLS PROGRAM FEATURES WITH A GENDER LENS

*A global review of education and workforce
interventions for youth*

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Abbreviations

AGI: Adolescent Girls Initiative (World Bank)
AGEI: Adolescent Girls Employment Initiative (Employment Fund in Nepal)
ALMP: Active Labor Market Participation
BEST: Business education skills training
CV: Curriculum vitae
DFID: Department for International Development (UK)
EPAG: Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGI Liberia)
EQUIP3: Educational Quality Improvement Program 3 (USAID)
GBV: Gender-based violence
HIV/AIDS: Human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICT: Information and communication technology
IGA: Income generating activity
LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean
LMA: Labor market assessment
LMICs: Low- and middle-income countries
MENA: Middle East and North Africa
M&E: Monitoring and evaluation
NEET: Not in education, employment, or training
P.A.C.E.: Personal Advancement and Career Enhancement program (GAP Inc.)
PYD: Positive youth development
S4YE: Solutions for Youth Employment (World Bank)
SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa
SSEA: South and Southeast Asia
STI: Sexually transmitted infection
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
WFD: Workforce development
WiPS: Women in Private Sector

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The PepsiCo Foundation's partnership with the International Youth Foundation supports PepsiCo's goal to invest \$100 million by 2025 in initiatives to provide 12.5 million women and girls around the world with essential resources for workforce readiness and in programs that empower women. PepsiCo is committed to raising the bar on talent and diversity in the workplace – and recognizes the importance of providing women with the knowledge and tools they need for economic advancement.

Introduction

A growing body of evidence documents the importance of soft skills in predicting long-term life outcomes, including improved employment, education and sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Heckman et al., 2006; Kautz et al., 2014). Soft skills are now widely viewed as critical to positive youth development (PYD) which emphasizes cultivating individual strengths as well as fostering the contextual support throughout family, educational, and community institutions to facilitate a successful transition to adulthood. Programs that promote PYD (1) support young people to gain the assets and skills they need to thrive, (2) strengthen the environment to better support young people's development, and (3) build the agency of young people so that they may positively influence their development and contribute to the societies in which they live (Alvarado et al. 2017). International youth programs increasingly take a holistic approach to developing these competencies and strengthening the design and effectiveness of youth-focused projects. Research confirms this link to economic participation, with studies recognizing that "a certain level of non-cognitive ability is a prerequisite for avoiding failure in the labor market" (Lindqvist & Vestman, 2011).

Soft skills (also called life skills, socio-emotional skills, and transferable skills, among other terms), refer to **a broad set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that enable people to navigate their environment effectively, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals**. More malleable than personality traits, soft skills can be learned and honed through direct interventions. Youth in different life stages can acquire soft skills despite limited prior opportunities or exposure to stressors, such as poverty or violence. Soft skills, in some form, are also transferable across cultures and sectors, complementing the acquisition of technical, vocational, and academic skills (Lippman et al., 2015).

Soft skills are increasingly viewed as foundational for *employability*, considering the changing nature of work globally. Social competencies that facilitate effective human interaction and teamwork are increasingly in demand as more developing economies transition from agriculture and manufacturing to greater reliance on service sectors (Dicken, 2007). Importantly, for youth with limited access to education, soft skills may also serve to augment academic skills and improve employment outcomes (Lippman, L. et al., 2015). Workers who are competent in soft skills are more likely to be productive, retained by their employers, and promoted for their contributions (Soland, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2013). For those who start their own ventures, soft skills contribute to the likelihood of entrepreneurial success (McClafferty, 2014; Rybek, 2014). Empowered with soft skills alongside technical training, youth in the informal sector become more confident and capable of starting businesses, monitoring and guiding employees, purchasing business materials at negotiated prices, and expanding their operations (Dewan & Sarkar, 2017).

Why are soft skills so essential for girls and other vulnerable groups?

With their potential to enhance life and work outcomes, soft skills may particularly benefit young women and other vulnerable groups.

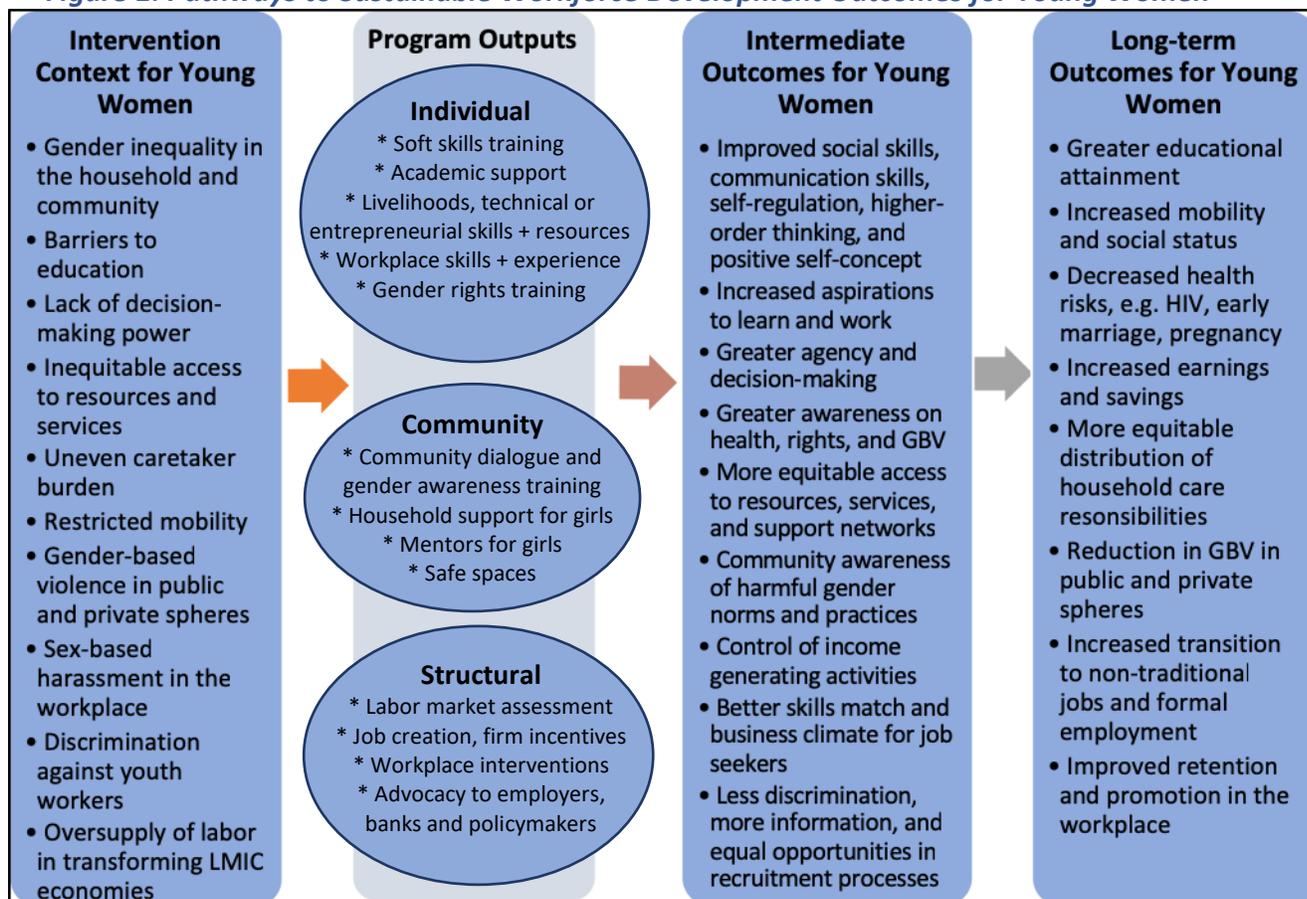
In every society, the construction of gender roles produces barriers to educational attainment, financial independence, and subsequent employment or entrepreneurship (Cohen, Myers & Rubin 2018):

- The high cost of schooling, financial constraints, and unequal investment in girls and boys, many young women have lower levels of educational access and attainment.
- Girls are typically more burdened with household and care responsibilities than boys, resulting in fewer hours and often less support to participate in education and training.
- Young women's mobility is more constrained than young men's due to security concerns and socio-cultural norms that discourage women from traveling alone or at night.
- For those who do access education, gender-biased teaching, and school-related gender-based violence can prevent girls from developing the knowledge and skills they need to transition to employment or entrepreneurship.
- Gender bias and stereotypes restrict girls' agency in determining the subjects they wish to study, the careers they aspire to, and the types of jobs they can access.
- Early marriage and pregnancy may further lead to interrupted schooling, social isolation, and limited access to job and training opportunities for girls and young women.
- Young women's economic participation is further curtailed by gender-based discrimination, e.g., when approval of a father or husband is required to work or take out loans, or hiring and promotion practices favor men consciously or unconsciously.
- Discriminatory labor laws can also perpetuate occupational segregation, wage gaps, and other structural inequalities in the labor market for girls and young women.

Consequently, girls and young women, especially those at the social and economic margins of their communities, may have limited or no opportunities to acquire skills they need to complete their education and enter the labor force.

Figure 1 below summarizes the myriad factors that influence youth education and workforce success, including contextual factors such as gender-based discrimination and violence, and unpaid care responsibilities (Cohen, Myers & Rubin 2018; World Bank, 2015).

Figure 1: Pathways to Sustainable Workforce Development Outcomes for Young Women



Relative to male counterparts, numerous constraints inhibit girls and young women from developing higher aspirations, skills, networks, and confidence. It is unsurprising that among the countries included in the International Labour Organization’s *School to Work Transition Survey*, female youth are three times more likely than male youth (8 versus 24 percent) to be outside the labor force and not in education (Elder & Kring, 2016). Despite their economic inactivity, almost 70 percent of female youth (aged 15-29) who were not in education indicated they wished to work in the future. Enhancing girls’ skills and opportunities is, therefore, a critical supply-side factor in achieving gender parity in the workforce.

Objective of this Report

A variety of programs that include soft skills training *have already* demonstrated positive impacts on girls’ and young women’s education, livelihoods, or employment. For girls, whose aspirations are limited by rigid gender norms and discrimination, soft skills training can enhance a sense of *agency*, which is the ability to see options, make choices, and exert control over one’s own life.

To enhance the likelihood of success for girls and young women, many programs use a combination of “gender-smart” features—from the specific soft skills they cultivate, to inclusive

recruitment strategies, to expanding access to economic resources and complementary services to enhance the “enabling environment” at the family or community levels.

No analysis to date, however, has explored the *specific features that contribute to educational attainment, livelihood, and employment outcomes*. In order to fill this gap, this research examined a representative sample of evaluated programs in order to understand the links between program features and program results, considering both gender-smart and gender-blind approaches.

The main objective of this report is to elucidate the constellation of features that characterize the most successful soft skill programs for girls and young women. The review aims to expand knowledge and understanding among program designers and practitioners on strategies that empower the most vulnerable, including adolescent girls. With a long-term goal to inform and improve program practice, findings may be leveraged as the underpinning for meaningful public outreach that can influence investment and policymaking. Alongside complementary structural interventions, increasing the number of girls and young women who participate in and benefit from soft skills programs can close gender gaps in educational attainment and employment, and result in positive outcomes in related domains of young women’s lives.

Parameters of analysis

There is an *a priori* understanding that soft skills are transferrable and valuable for numerous reasons in many settings. **However, single-prong soft-skill interventions for youth are exceedingly rare.** This is because it is generally agreed, within the field of positive youth development, that multi-level and holistic approaches are most effective because they generate spillover effects into multiple areas of young people’s lives.¹ Thus, soft skill interventions commonly overlap with other economic and social programs in order to address the structural factors that impede positive outcomes for participants.

Evaluations of these multi-level programs rarely isolate the effects of soft skills training from the effects of other program components. Even when controlling for different treatment packages, the impacts of specific soft skill elements are typically not teased out. Soft skills training also varies “dosage” levels in terms of intensity and duration of activities, making it difficult to compare across studies.

With an appreciation of this context, this report does not attempt to analyze the unique impact of soft skills but instead aims to draw lessons about how they are integrated into a variety of program approaches across many socio-cultural settings. Further, this report limits its focus to programs that track outcomes in education, livelihoods and/or employment. Some of these

¹ Findings from a trial in Uganda suggest that combined interventions might be more effective among adolescent girls than interventions aiming to improve labor market outcomes solely through vocational training, or to change risky behaviors solely through education programs (Bandiera et al., 2012). A study of different multi-component intervention packages for delaying marriage and childbirth in Kenya found that girls who actively participated in the “safe spaces” intervention (where strategies involved life skills training for health and wealth creation) experienced greater health and wealth outcomes,¹ as well as positive education outcomes – implying that participating in girls’ groups with combined health and economic content had spillover effects onto their educational attainment (Austrian et al., 2018).

programs also tracked other thematic outcomes, for example, related to adolescent health delays in marriage and childbearing. However, these outcomes are not included in this particular analysis.

What are “soft skills” and which ones are considered here?

Soft skills include the broad set of skills, behaviors, or personal qualities that enable someone to navigate their environment effectively, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. In an effort to harmonize terms and build understanding around specific skills for youth workforce success, a 2015 USAID global report found that five soft skills had the most evidence for successful youth workforce outcomes: social skills, communication, higher-order thinking skills, and the intrapersonal skills of self-control and positive self-concept (Lippman et al., 2015).

1. **Social skills** enable people to get along well with others, including respect, use of context-appropriate behavior, and ability to resolve conflict.
2. **Communication skills** are the oral, written, non-verbal, and listening skills needed to communicate effectively in the workplace.
3. **Higher-order thinking skills** include problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills, representing the ability to identify an issue and take in information from multiple sources to evaluate options in order to reach a reasonable conclusion.
4. **Self-control** reflects one’s ability to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, and regulate behaviors.
5. **Positive self-concept** includes self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well-being and pride.

Table 1 below presents specific soft skills' importance ranking by the strength of evidence on specific workforce outcomes, according to USAID (2015). The World Bank and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Skills have validated these skills. They therefore served as the starting point for this investigation.

Table 1: Most Important Soft Skills for Youth to Achieve Key Workforce Outcomes

Ranked by the strength of evidence base according to the number of supporting studies (from a subset of 58 among 2015 USAID literature review) focused on 15- to 29-year-old youth and entry-level workers.

		<i>Importance for Specific Workforce Outcome</i>				<i>Sector</i>	<i>Empirical Evidence of Malleability Across Stages</i>		
Total # Positive Findings	Soft Skill	Employment	Performance / Promotion	Income / Wages	Entrepreneurial Success	Evidence also in the informal economy	10-14 Years	15-18 Years	19-29 Years
34	Social Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
32	Higher-order thinking skills	X	X		X		X	X	Theoretical Evidence
31	Self-control	X	X	X	X		X	X	
25	Positive Self-concept	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
25	Communication	X			X	X	X	Theoretical Evidence	
22	Hardworking and Dependable	X	X	X		X	X	X	Theoretical Evidence
21	Self-motivation		X	X	X		X	Theoretical Evidence	
19	Teamwork	X	X		X		Theoretical Evidence		Theoretical Evidence
17	Responsibility			X			X	X	X
16	Positive Attitude	X		X		X		Theoretical Evidence	
Other Top 10 Soft Skills for Specific Outcome:		Cultural Sensitivity; Learning and Growth Orientation	Integrity and Ethics; Learning and Growth Orientation; Persuasiveness; Cultural Sensitivity	Integrity and Ethics; Goal Orientation	Initiative; Adaptability; Creativity; Goal Orientation				

What is “gender-smart” youth programming?

Gender-based barriers may impact the extent to which girls and young women can participate in soft skills programs and leverage their outcomes to succeed in education and the workforce. *Gender-smart* interventions, therefore, may be more likely to report positive effects for girls and young women than programs that are *gender-blind*, or unaware of these barriers.

“Gender-smart” (or aware, sensitive, responsive) implies that a program recognizes gender dynamics in the implementation context and intentionally considers differences in needs between female and male participants. Gender-smart approaches may include using recruitment and retention strategies to enhance girls' or young women's participation; tailoring specific content to girls/women and boys/men; and engaging populations beyond the participants themselves to improve gender relations and other social norms in the home or community.

Truly “gender-transformative” interventions are designed to not only improve the immediate condition of girls and young women but also to enhance their social and economic status. They do this by changing how girls and women value themselves and are valued in their families and communities. At the societal level, gender-smart programs also seek to transform inequitable gender norms, practices, and laws, which can open future opportunities for girls and young women even beyond program participants.

Are findings applicable to the wider universe of youth programs?

Results and recommendations from this study are based on a set of 42 evaluations. These 42 studies do not encompass the universe of all youth programs that include soft skills globally, but rather those on which evaluations have been conducted. There may be gaps between *soft skills interventions delivered in any form*, and the *evidence base available* to analyze their outcomes.

Within the evidence base, program participants skew female because the majority of evaluations of programs conducted across sectors tend to focus on girls or young women, either partially or exclusively. This may reflect the intentions of the youth development community to close gender gaps and foster learning on what works for adolescent girls considering gender unequal access to opportunities; it may not indicate that girls and young women have greater access to skills training in practice.

Even among ostensibly open/untargeted programs, it is vital to understand how the beneficiary population may differ from the general population. A program that randomly assigns training to half of those who apply for training is following best practice for conducting an evaluation, yet the evidence is most relevant for the population of “those who are most likely to apply for training (World Bank, 2015).” Findings from targeted programs are even more specific to sub-populations, and among them, those who self-select or are recruited for participation. It also is essential to examine the extent to which certain types of programs and strategies work better for specific groups or by gender, under what conditions, and whether there are significant

cultural and country variations in effectiveness. To date, there have been very few systematic program evaluations that consider how these factors influence outcomes in the United States or elsewhere. A case in point is that most interventions enroll boys and girls, but do not look at whether programs are equally useful for both genders.

Limitations

The team sourced studies using narrow search criteria and a “snowballing approach” (beginning with key informants and widely-cited reports, then following citations to identify additional studies). The resulting collection of studies evaluated a varied range of programs targeting a long developmental period (i.e., early adolescence to young adulthood) and broad set of outcomes in education, livelihoods and/or workforce, among others. Therefore, lessons from proof points and concluding recommendations represent a starting point for good practices to adapt locally, and are not definitive of impact in every setting. In numerous instances, poor reporting also limited the team’s ability to identify whether features were present and contributing to effectiveness. Features were coded based on information available in published evaluations, and in some cases supplemented with content hosted on organizational websites. It is possible that other features may have been used but were not reported. While some package of personal and financial resources is likely the most common component in youth training programs, it is also possible that findings over-index on the “resources” domain, as these assets tend to be the most consistently *reported* component in program documentation.

Key Questions

This review seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the implementation approaches, design features, and specific training components of programs that leverage soft skills for education, livelihoods, and employment outcomes?**
- 2. What is the relationship between program features and effectiveness for girls and young women?**

Methodology

Conducted remotely from Washington, D.C., this global review utilized a mixed-methods approach to map program design and implementation features alongside effectiveness for girls and young women. To accomplish this, the team undertook a desk review of evaluations and assessments of youth programs leveraging soft skills training over the past 20 years (published between 1999 and 2019). Using the World Health Organization’s definition, an *adolescent girl* is defined as any person between ages 10 and 19. *Young people* here refers to all individuals between ages 10 and 29 and is also reflected in the term *girls and young women*.

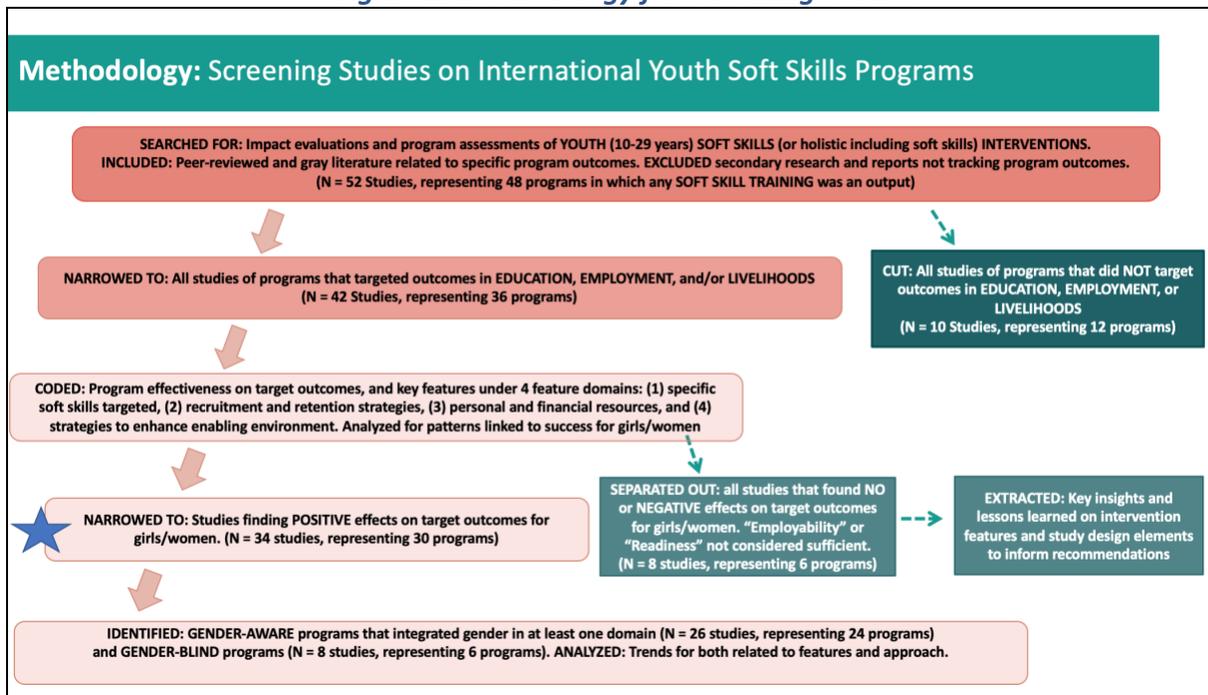
Interventions that seek to build youth’s soft skills are rarely stand-alone trainings. As mediating factors, skills are typically targeted in tandem with other initiatives to enhance program outcomes. Given the range of definitions and specific competencies under the “soft skills” umbrella in different contexts, analogous and related terms (e.g., “transferable” or “21st-century” skills) were used to search for and identify soft skills programs (see Annex 4 for

Catalogue of Search Term Combinations). To capture the diversity of interventions leveraging soft skills, the team initially considered 52 studies representing 48 programs in numerous thematic areas. Program scopes, impact goals, and theories of change were heterogeneous, with objectives often related to health; gender empowerment and violence prevention; education and learning; and/or economic development.

A first criterion for considering programs was that there existed semi-rigorous or rigorous evaluation data that tracked outcomes (see Annex 3 for Strength of Evidence Categorization). A second criterion for inclusion was that the program includes a soft skills training component. The final inclusion criterion was that the evaluation tracked **outcomes related to education, livelihoods, and/or employment**. Reports that did not target and track specific program outcomes in at least one of these areas were excluded (see Annex 5 for full *Criteria for Sourcing Evidence*).

The team searched academic databases as well as organizational websites including USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), Population Council, Child Trends, YouthPower, UNICEF, the World Bank, and International Labour Organization. The snowballing technique described above was also used to identify additional sources of critical published and gray literature (not peer-reviewed) online and through networks. Representing 36 different interventions, a total of 42 qualifying studies were reviewed and synthesized, in addition to 75 other non-qualifying reports providing relevant background for this review.

Figure 2: Methodology for Screening Studies



To analyze the content of the evidence, the team created a database with both descriptive statistics and outcome data. Variables such as country, training setting, target population,

program design features, and domains of activities were documented, along with reported outcomes. Other variables related to study design were also documented to understand the research timeline and limitations and assess the reliability of findings. The team sorted studies by those that found a positive effect on target outcomes for women or girls (30), and those that found no or negative effects on the target outcomes (8), and further determined if programs were “gender-blind” (6) or “gender-smart” (24). Several programs were the subject of multiple studies conducted at different points in time or as a follow-up with the same cohort. The total number of programs represented by “effective” (30) and “ineffective” (8) is higher than the 36 programs represented in the 42 qualifying studies, as two were reflected in one “effective” and one “ineffective” study. Features of these two interventions were included in the analysis of effective programs. Observations and recommendations were drawn from trends in intervention features among studies that found positive program outcomes on education, livelihoods, and/or workforce outcomes.

In addition to reviewing literature, stakeholder input from youth experts and program implementers were used to enhance the report’s findings. By leveraging the extensive networks of IYF and ICRW’s Global Youth Development portfolio, the team conducted semi-structured interviews over the telephone with seven stakeholders from non-governmental organizations in the fields of education and workforce development. Six experts with in-depth knowledge of the PYD evidence base also offered consultative input during the draft of the report (see Annex 6 for a List of Additional Contributors and Basic Interview Guide). The research team also sourced “proof points” from three different country contexts through stakeholder input along with supplemental program reports, curricula, and internal data.

Findings

Results of Question 1: Descriptive statistics of 36 programs from 42 qualifying studies

What are the implementation approaches, design features, and specific training components of programs that leverage soft skills for education, livelihoods, and employment outcomes?

- Representing 36 different interventions, a total of 42 studies were reviewed and synthesized, in addition to 75 other non-qualifying reports providing relevant background on soft skills.
- Evaluated programs spanned many geographies and target populations, with the highest number in Sub-Saharan Africa. Just over half the programs trained only females while the rest were mixed-sex.
- Most interventions delivered the program in community-based settings (e.g., a training center or other setting outside of traditional schools or workplaces), with an average duration of 11.9 months and a range of soft skills training intensity.
- Four main domains emerged from the review of program features: (1) specific soft skills targeted by programs; (2) recruitment and retention strategies; (3) personal and

financial resources offered; and (4) activities focused on the enabling environment.

Different types of youth programs leverage soft skills in efforts to achieve outcomes related to education, livelihoods, and employment. These range from education initiatives, to job training programs, to multi-sectoral or holistic interventions for girls. While there is a crossover between these, a simplified typology is offered in Table 2 below:

*Table 2: Simplified Typology of Programs Leveraging Soft Skills**

Youth Empowerment in Education Programs	Typically for male and female students but sometimes girl-centric, these programs are conducted through schools to improve education and learning outcomes and/or enhance the likelihood that young people return to or remain in education. They may include life skills modules tailored for age and gender per the national curriculum, other transferrable skills for work readiness, or classroom sessions on leadership to promote a pedagogy of youth-led learning. More comprehensive education programs also work with parents and mentors through community mobilization efforts (e.g., Room to Read GEP, Ishraq).
Youth Empowerment in Workforce Development Programs	Interventions are part of a broader PYD agenda, with objectives related to health, wellness, and rights. Participants are often underserved or marginalized from the formal education system or economy. Many programs in this category specifically target livelihoods and workforce development outcomes as a critical component (TESFA), of which a subset intentionally promotes adolescent girls' empowerment by addressing gender gaps in access to opportunities and social norms in the community (e.g., AGI, AGEI, BALIKA).
Job Training Programs	These include technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, active labor market participation (ALMP) interventions, and/or other partnerships with the public and private sector to increase employability and rates of employment for youth. They are often gender-blind and have differential impacts on male and female participants (e.g., Procajoven, Juventud y Empleo).

* Various approaches leverage soft skills training, e.g., HIV prevention programs; however, only interventions that targeted education or employment outcomes were considered for this review.

Participant Characteristics

The 36 programs captured by this global review were concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa (13 programs) and South and Southeast Asia (10). About half as many were implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean (6) and the Middle East and North Africa (5), and two others were conducted with youth in the US. As Table 3 below illustrates, a variety of age clusters were targeted by the programs. Primary participants for all programs were young people, although numerous programs had components with secondary beneficiaries such as trainees' households or community members. Most common populations to engage were late adolescents (15-19 years) followed by young adults (20-29 years), or both (15-29 years). Just

over half the programs (19) targeted females only (52.8%), and the remaining 17 programs were mixed-sex (47.2%).

Table 3: Target Age Ranges by Cluster

<i>Early adolescents: 10-14 years</i>	<i>Late adolescents: 15-19 years</i>	<i>Young adults: 20-29 years</i>
Early adolescents: 4/36 (11.1%)		
Early and late adolescents: 5/36 (13.9%)		
	Late adolescents: 9/36 (25%)	
	Late adolescents and young adults: 11/36 (30.6%)	
		Young adults: 6/36 (16.7%)
All ages of youth: 1/36 (2.8%)		

Training Setting

The most common implementation setting was in communities (75%), with training conducted outside a traditional school or workplace, for instance, at a TVET institution, faith center or other local organization. School-based interventions were also common for programs engaging students during or after class (30.6%). One program was delivered in the workplace, offering junior employees soft skills training in a factory setting (2.8%). Totals are higher than 100% as some programs conducted activities in two settings.

Description of Program Features

Four main domains emerged from the review of program features: (1) specific soft skills targeted by programs; (2) recruitment and retention strategies; (3) personal and financial resources offered; and (4) activities focused on the enabling environment.

Domain 1: Specific soft skills targeted

With a “soft skills component” as the common denominator for identifying youth programs, the review sought to code specific skills targeted by analyzing the outcomes tracked for participants’ skill acquisition. In cases where specific skills were not measured, module descriptions and curricula themselves were examined to capture organizational intent to train on related topics.

Through tagging of specific skill modules and related terms, six main soft skill areas were identified and coded across the studies. The top four targeted within all 36 programs correspond with the literature on the key soft skills for workforce success (see Table 1). These were: communication skills (72%), positive self-concept (69%), higher-order thinking (44%), and self-regulation (44%). Leadership skills (33%) and goal setting (28%) were also occasionally targeted.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Specific Soft Skill Modules

Specific Soft Skill	Additional Related Terms	Prevalence (Frequency in N=36)
Communication	Assertive communication, respect, negotiation	72.2% (26)
Positive self-concept	Self-esteem, self-confidence, agency and voice	69.4% (25)

Self-regulation	Self-control, emotional intelligence, responsibility, delayed gratification	44.4% (16)
Higher-order thinking	Creative problem solving, critical thinking	44.4% (16)
Leadership	Civic leadership, resisting peer pressure, being a role model	33.3% (12)
Goal setting	Enhancing aspirations, SMART goals, decision-making	27.8% (10)

Domain 2: Recruitment and retention strategies

To address participation barriers, over 83% of programs employed one or more inclusion strategies that could purposefully or indirectly promote women’s recruitment and retention in the program. These included: outreach to vulnerable groups through target marketing or incentives (72%); ensuring easy access for women by localizing the training in the target community (56%); defraying participation costs, e.g. through a stipend or transport subsidy (6/36); and provision of childcare for young parents or youth responsible for child relatives (1/36).

Domain 3: Personal and financial resources

A centerpiece of most youth training interventions is the package of “hard” skills and resources intended to support their successful completion of the program. Personal assets and financial resources can equip participants to become better students, workers, or entrepreneurs. A majority of programs offered training on technical, livelihood and/or entrepreneurial skills (58.3%), although just 5.6% provided small loans or grants for income-generating activities (IGAs). Mobile ICT was used strategically by at least 8.3% of programs, for example, by providing or leveraging participants' phones for communication, digital finance, or job matching.

Programs frequently provided financial literacy training and/or supported participants to open savings accounts (55.5%), and 11% offered a conditional cash transfer or scholarship, such as a bursary to attend formal schooling or cash for work. Approximately 47% of programs connected participants to real workplace experience, such as job shadowing or an internship, and one-third trained participants in workplace readiness, including CV writing, interviewing skills, and/or time management. Nearly one-third trained on supervising, conflict resolution, and skills required for successful people management.

Domain 4: Activities focused on the enabling environment

Several interventions included strategies to enhance the enabling environment for women's education, livelihoods, and/or employment. Addressing structural issues, these features ranged from activities to promote gender awareness and equality among participants and their communities, to strategies that build capacity in system actors, align skills programs with the labor market, and increase demand for female youth in the workforce. They are described alongside their prevalence in Table 4 below.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Enabling Environment Activities

Enabling Feature	Possible Activities	Prevalence (Frequency in N=36)
Safe spaces or separate classrooms	Gender intentionality with classroom composition; distinct spaces for girls' clubs; ensuring training space is conducive for debriefing sensitive subjects	58.3% (21)
Gender awareness	Training for participants on gender, power, rights, and relevant cultural issues such as early marriage and violence against women.	52.8% (19)
Community mobilization	Engaging the broader population (beyond participants and their families) to raise support for girls' advancement in school or the workforce	44.4% (16)
Youth-led or peer support component	Activities to promote youth leadership, civic engagement, peer learning or peer support	38.9% (14)
Household engagement	Engaging participants' families in some aspect of the program to increase support or buy-in for girls' participation	33.3% (12)
Demand-side WFD intervention: Labor intermediation	Insertion into the labor market; job vouchers to encourage employers to hire youth; stimulating new job creation with investment/incentives; other business climate interventions	33.3% (12)
Teacher training	Capacity building with teachers or school leaders on gender, soft skills, youth-centered pedagogy, or other supportive educational approaches	25% (9)
Demand-side WFD intervention: Labor market assessment	Assessment of the labor market demand and capacity to absorb training graduates without displacing other workers; surveys with top employers; solicitation of letters of intent from internship sites indicating skill needs and commitment to hiring successful interns	19.4% (7)
Counseling / mentoring	One-on-one psychosocial support; non-career mentoring; case management, including GBV referrals and social services	16.7% (6)
Demand-side WFD intervention: Employer sensitization	Raising awareness among hiring managers and other senior leaders on potential biases against youth and young women	13.9% (5)

Results of Question 2: Analysis of 34 studies representing 30 “effective” programs

What is the relationship between program features and effectiveness for girls and young women?

- Of the 30 effective programs found in this review, six programs (20%) were gender-blind, and 24 (80%) were gender-smart.
- The top four skills targeted by gender-smart programs were communication, positive self-concept, higher-order thinking skills, and self-regulation/self-control.
- Most gender-smart programs used targeted outreach activities to vulnerable groups (67%), and localized the training, granting women easy access by addressing logistical barriers to participation (71%).
- Among gender-blind programs, workplace experience (e.g., internships or job shadowing) and technical, livelihoods, and entrepreneurial skills were the most common features (100%). Gender-blind programs were less likely to target financial literacy (33%) and workforce readiness skills (50%).
- Approximately two-thirds of gender-smart programs (67%) implemented a program that addressed gender-related issues (e.g., child marriage, gender roles, power relations) and provided a safe space for program activities.
- Fifteen out of 24 gender-smart programs (62.5%) reported changes in gender-equitable attitudes among girls and their family members, particularly parents.
- Gender-blind programs tended to focus on demand-side barriers by conducting a labor market assessment and providing incentives to employees for creating jobs. Gender-blind programs were also less likely to target intervention activities at the household or community level,

What is considered “effective” in this review?

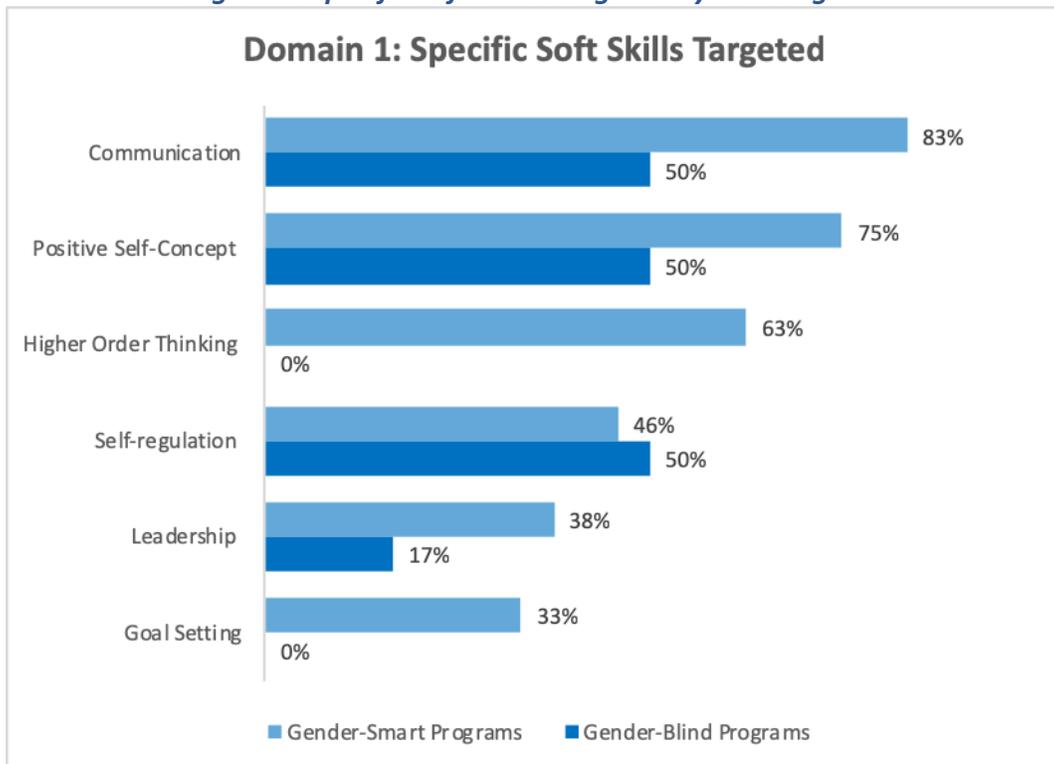
Annex 1 provides summary information on all qualifying programs within this review. Studies varied from program monitoring reports and assessments with non-experimental designs to rigorous experimental tests of intervention effects. A program was considered effective if it was successful in improving outcomes in at least one of the three target areas of this review (i.e., education, livelihoods, and/or workforce outcomes). Studies also found positive effects on girls and young women in related areas, including outcomes in work readiness, gender empowerment, and health. These were often supportive learning or behavioral outcomes that served as predictive indicators of future empowerment or employability; however, for this review, such effects were not sufficient to qualify a program as *effective*. For a full list of gender-smart output and outcome indicators recommended for soft skills programs, see Annex 2.

All programs included in this review focused on at least two, and in most cases three or four of the general “feature” domains: specific soft skills, inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, personal and financial resources, and the enabling environment.

Domain 1: Specific Soft Skills Targeted

Of the 30 effective programs found in this review, six programs (20%) were gender-blind, and 24 (80%) were gender-smart. As shown in Figure 3, in the domain of *Specific Soft Skills Targeted*, the top four skills targeted by gender-smart programs were communication, positive self-concept, higher-order thinking skills, and self-regulation/self-control, which corresponds with the literature on the key soft skills for workforce success (Lippman et al., 2015). Overall, gender-blind programs consisted mostly of TVET programs, which had focused less on specific soft skills as compared to gender-smart programs. While studies of job training programs frequently cite the workplace relevance and employer demand for soft skills in general, which *specific* skills they targeted in this domain was usually not illustrated, nor were gender differences in soft skill *needs* considered for male and female trainees entering job markets biased towards men. Conversely, gender-smart programs were more likely to craft soft skills curricula based on an understanding of the various (and sometimes different) competencies adolescent girls and boys need to succeed.

Figure 3: Specific Soft Skills Targeted by the Program

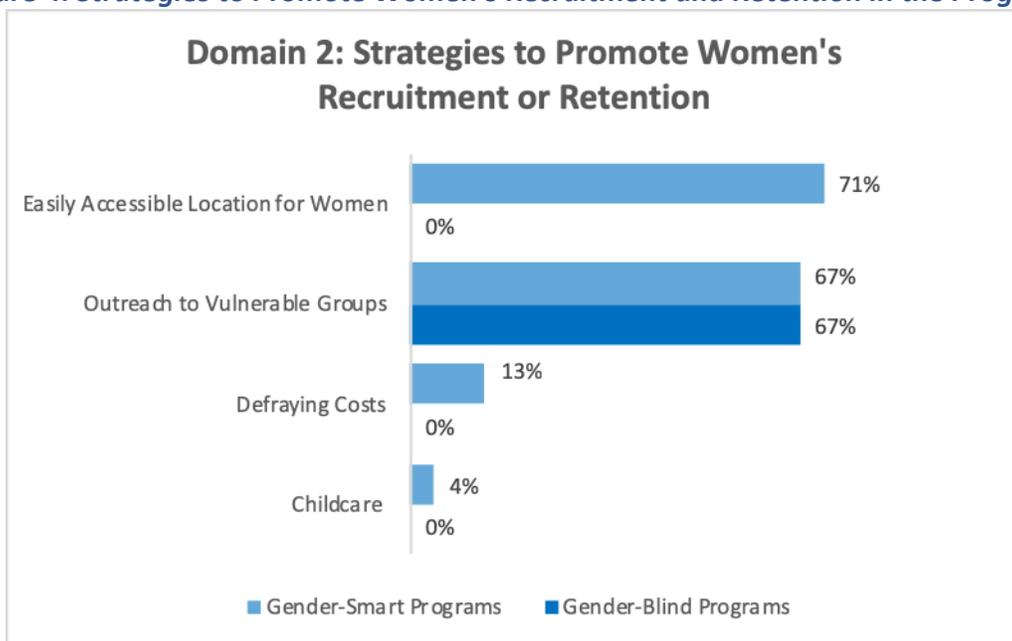


Domain 2: Strategies to Promote Women’s Recruitment and Retention

As illustrated in Figure 4, most gender-smart programs used *Strategies to Promote Women’s Recruitment and Retention*, a domain which consisted of targeted outreach activities to vulnerable groups (67%), and localization of the training, granting women easy access by addressing logistical barriers to participation (71%). Three out of 24 gender-smart programs also included measures to help defray costs for participants, typically through transportation or other subsidies to ensure high rates of attendance (13%) and one gender-smart program catered for childcare (4%).

Recognizing that many disadvantaged women had a keen interest in employability skills but were not accessing such training, seven World Bank pilots introduced gender-smart recruitment and retention strategies to foster greater inclusion and participation. In Nepal, the project sought to address enrollment barriers by paying a premium to recruit disadvantaged groups of women. The Liberia pilot offered childcare as a strategy to retain women who were responsible for small children. In Haiti, participants were incentivized to complete the program with a stipend covering monthly food and transport costs. To address safety concerns and restrictive norms on women’s mobility, the Afghanistan pilot contracted a van service to bring participants to and from training sessions (World Bank, 2015). Gender-blind programs were less likely to use these types of recruitment and retention strategies tailored to women, although 67% were marketed to vulnerable or economically disadvantaged youth.

Figure 4: Strategies to Promote Women’s Recruitment and Retention in the Program

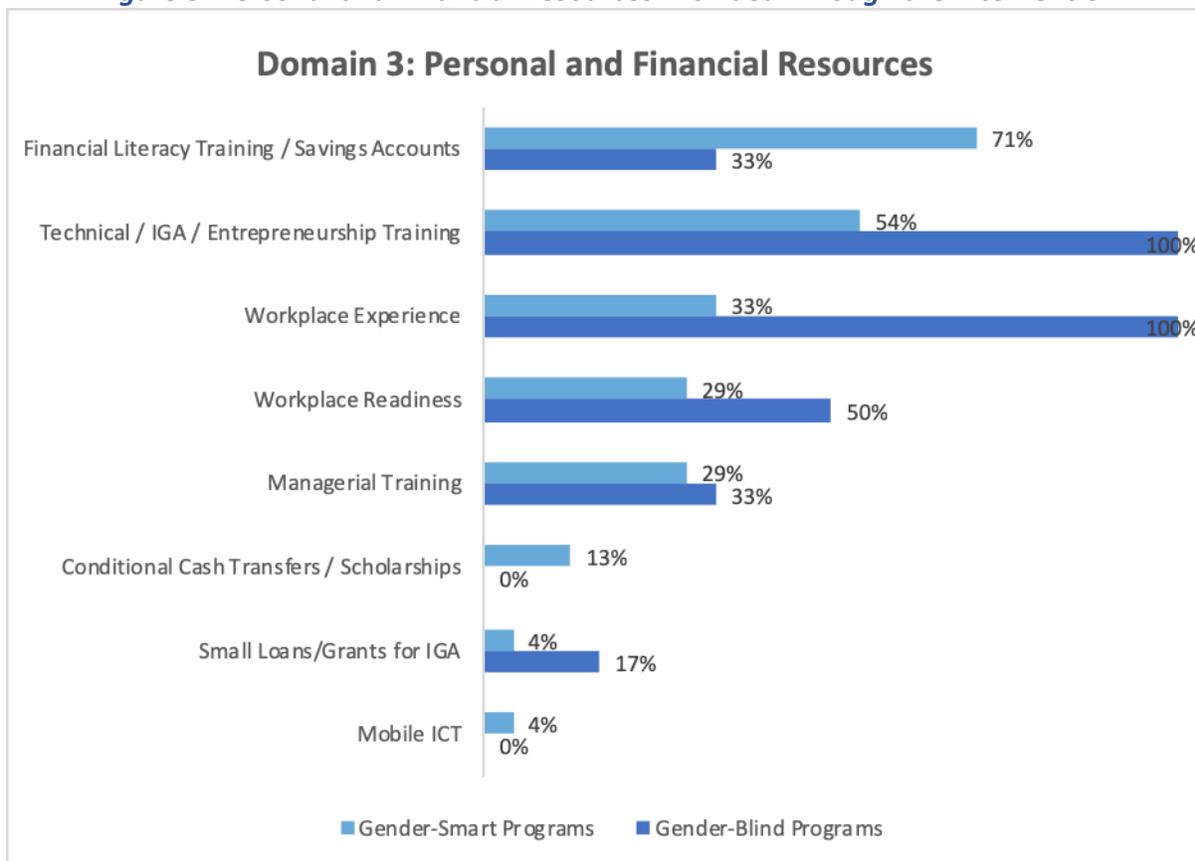


Domain 3: Personal and Financial Resources

The types of intervention activities varied widely across programs. Within the *Personal and Financial Resources* domain, providing financial literacy and information on savings accounts was most common among the gender-smart programs (71%). Approximately more than half of

gender-smart programs also focused on strengthening technical, livelihood, and entrepreneurial skills (54%) (Figure 5). Approximately one-third of programs provided workplace readiness skills (i.e., interviewing, CVs, time management) (29%), managerial training (29%), and/or offered workplace experience (33%). Among gender-blind programs, workplace experience like internships or job shadowing (100%) and technical, livelihoods, or entrepreneurial skills training (100%) were the most common features. Gender-blind programs were less likely to target financial literacy (33%) and workforce readiness skills (50%).

Figure 5: Personal and Financial Resources Provided Through the Intervention

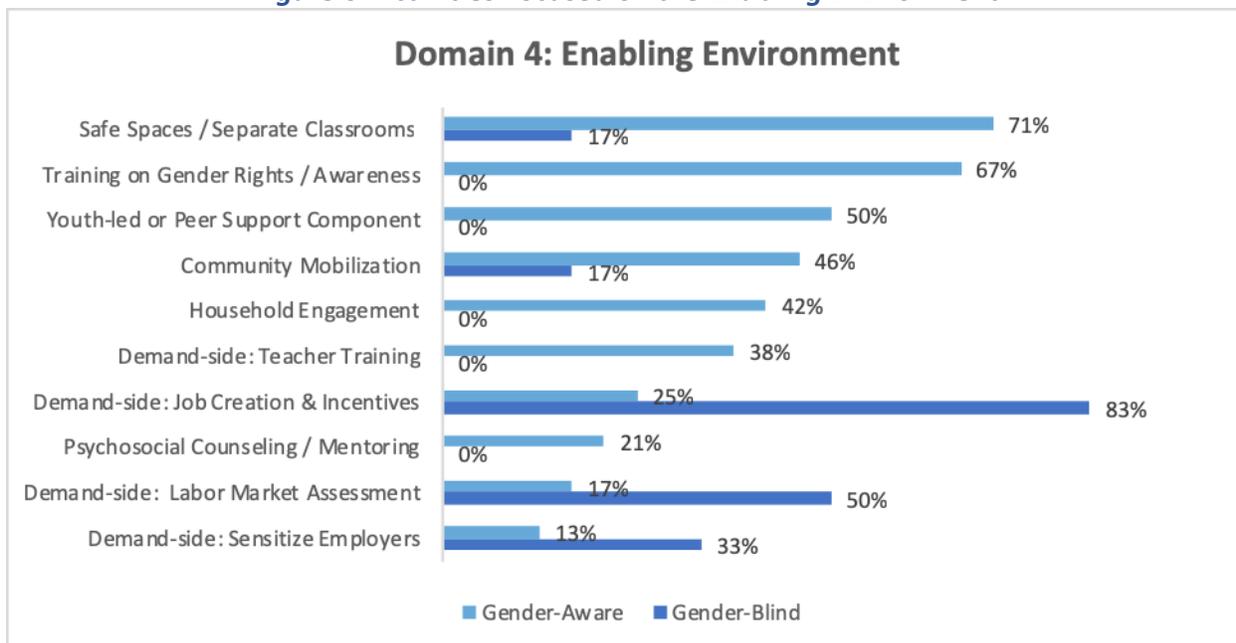


Domain 4: Activities Focused on the Enabling Environment

As shown in Figure 6 within the *Enabling Environment* domain, approximately two-thirds of gender-smart programs (67%) implemented a program that addressed gender-related issues (e.g., child marriage, gender roles, power relations) and provided a safe space for program activities. Integrating gender into education and workforce development programs involves identifying and addressing gender inequalities within program design and implementation. Greater awareness of the impact of gender-related factors can facilitate attitudinal and behavior change among men, women, boys, and girls and address structural gender-based inequities. Efforts need to extend beyond individual-level factors into the community and/or other related institutions to provide tailored information, address gender discrimination and inequitable gender roles, and encourage parent-adolescent communication and community

dialogue to support positive changes in education and workforce development outcomes. Fifteen out of 24 gender-smart programs (62.5%), demonstrated changes in gender-equitable attitudes among girls and their family members, particularly parents. Approximately 50% of gender-smart programs focused on youth-led or youth-driven (rather than exclusively adult-led) activities. Within effective programs, this included strategies like peer education and the development of peer support networks. Youth played a leading role in their own and their peers' development, contributing to improved program design, implementation, and impact.

Figure 6: Activities Focused on the Enabling Environment



Gender-blind programs tended to focus on demand-side barriers by conducting a labor market assessment and providing incentives to employees for creating jobs. Most traditional technical and vocational education programs under this review were gender-blind but were also found to be effective, albeit to varying degrees for young women and young men. Training typically included a classroom-based life skills training module, vocational training, and internships coordinated with private sector employers to provide on-the-job training, shadowing opportunities, or actual work experience. The majority of the programs also included at least some soft skills training and importantly tailored courses for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Gender-blind programs did not target intervention activities at the household or community level, except the Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP). The AWDP focused on increasing employment placement by improving the quality and accessibility of access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Business Education Skills Training (BEST) institutions, through improved curricula and new course offerings, and enhancing management and capacity to meet present labor-market demand. The program required its training partners to consult with local businesses and use their knowledge of the local labor market to develop TVET courses that meet market demand (Creative Associates International,

2018). The AWDP required at least 25% of training beneficiaries to be women. Women in Private Sector (WiPS) grants sought to address barriers to young women's labor force participation, catering to issues such as family concerns, and reluctance on the part of employers and trainees to engage in a particular 'masculine' trade. Training sessions were conveniently offered in their buildings, and meetings were organized to introduce the benefits of the program and build trust with women's husbands and other family members. As a result, AWDP exceeded its expectations for the involvement of Afghan women in the workforce, with 36% against its 25% placement/promotion target. The program trained 15,813 mid-career women (68% between the ages of 21-30) in a range of skills, which were identified by companies as being in short supply. Of the women who were trained, 10,252 were newly employed in technical positions or were given salary increases in recognition of the new skills they brought to the workplace.

[The Evidence for PYD Program Effectiveness on Education, Livelihoods, and Work Outcomes](#)

The analysis of effective programs find that two types of programs seem to be most effective in workforce development and education programs:

- 1) Job training programs that target the demand-side barriers and are tailored for vulnerable and marginalized groups; and
- 2) Holistic programs that use a PYD approach to empower women and girls toward education, livelihoods, or workforce success.

Several interventions that had positive evidence on education and employment outcomes were PYD programs that used a holistic approach to help increase positive self-concept at the same time as improving education, livelihoods, and workforce development outcomes. PYD strategies take into account the broader social and structural factors that influence behaviors. Utilizing this approach can offer a novel opportunity to strengthen workforce development and education efforts, particularly for adolescent girls and young women. PYD is focused on building young people's skills, assets, and competencies; fostering healthy relationships; and transforming norms and systems (Alvarado et al., 2017). PYD programs that target workforce development have improved participants' assets, including vocational and soft skills, as well as successfully targeted the enabling environment (Plaut & Moss, 2017).

These skills may be beneficial in helping adolescent girls and young women navigate the challenges in gaining employment and attending school. Youth empowerment programs in this review tended to improve soft skills, create a safe space, provide community mobilization efforts, and target gender-based barriers for girls. PYD programs such as Room to Read (see Box 1) and Ishraq targeted soft skills, addressed gender-related issues, provided outreach to marginalized populations, and enhanced the enabling environment. Both addressed the educational barriers girls faced and implemented a comprehensive approach that targeted multiple levels of activities, from community mobilization and household engagement to psychosocial counseling and mentoring or case management.

Box 1: Positive Effects on Education Outcomes from Room to Read's GEP in Nepal

Proof Point 1: Girls' Education Program – Nepal

Objective: Room to Read collaborates with communities and local governments in countries in Asia and Africa, to promote and enable educational opportunities and attainment for all children through literacy and gender equality in education. Room to Read's Girls' Education Program (GEP) in Nepal supports girls to complete secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate critical life decisions. The life skills education activities are designed for school-going, adolescent girls from economically disadvantaged areas, to keep them in school and prepare them to deal with crucial life decisions.

Activities: The GEP creates girl-friendly school environments, financially supports girls to attend and remain in school through graduation, and provides female mentorship and life skills training to girls. The program supports girls to develop the skills they need to navigate life, including critical thinking, decision making, communication, relationship building, and self-confidence, among others. The program employs Social Mobilizers, who may be previous participants in the GEP, to work closely with girls and their families to ensure that girls stay in school. These young women also serve as mentors and community facilitators whose role is to follow-up with participants and encourage their continued practice of life skills, co-facilitate workshops with teachers, and speak with community members about the importance of girls' education. The Social Mobilizer component allows mentors to contribute to their communities and enables mentees to develop critical support networks to help them transition.

Results: Room to Read defines life skills as *a girl's ability to meet day-to-day challenges and make informed decisions about her life*. Adolescent girls, parents, teachers, and Social Mobilizers all report that the GEP has positively impacted participants. A 2015 study found that acquiring these skills was linked to improvement in girls' school enrollment, retention, and completion rates. Moreover, girls performed better and developed greater stamina to complete their secondary education.

Source: Cadena (2015).

Ishraq in Egypt was another multi-dimensional program for out-of-school girls, which combined traditional tested program elements (e.g., literacy, life skills, nutrition) with more innovative activities like sports and financial education. The intervention presented reproductive health information and essential life skills to young women. It included communication, team building, volunteering, negotiation, decision-making, and critical thinking. The curriculum focused on life skills and covered identity, family, and community; girls' rights and duties; reproductive health; nutrition; and the environment. The reproductive health component covers topics such as adolescence, violence, marriage, maternal health, and pregnancy. Sessions were held in youth centers and facilitated by female secondary school graduates, known as promoters, who had been selected from the communities. Over the past decade, Ishraq has promoted significant changes at the individual, community, and institutional levels. For girls, program participation

has improved literacy, developed life skills, increased self-confidence, led to greater mobility and community participation, changed attitudes and behaviors, and built solidarity and social support among girls who have traditionally been socially isolated. More than half of girls joined formal schooling.

Cross-sectoral programs in this review include objectives related to economic development and education, along with interventions aimed to improve health outcomes. Evidence from a systematic review of PYD programs illustrates that these types of programs have effects on multi-sectoral outcomes of interest (Alvarado et al., 2017). For example, the BALIKA program is effective in improving girls' outcomes across sectors (see Box 2).

Box 2: Positive Effects on Livelihoods and Health Outcomes from BALIKA in Bangladesh

Proof Point 2: BALIKA – Bangladesh

Objective: The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) project implemented a skill-building program for rural adolescent girls (aged 12–18) designed to increase girls' skills, self-confidence, self-awareness, and strategies for advocating for themselves to delay marriage (Amin et al., 2016).

Activities: BALIKA used a girls-only community club approach to receive one of three intervention strategies: education, gender rights awareness training, and livelihood skills training. The overall approach is to engage communities by working with local institutions and supportive adults to create a favorable environment to invest in girls. These investments include creating safe spaces, supportive networks, and a platform that can bring girls together, as well as various skill-building activities. In the education intervention, in-school girls received educational tutoring in mathematics and English, and out-of-school girls received financial skills and communicative English learning sessions. In the gender-rights intervention, girls received information on sexual and reproductive health, gender rights, negotiation, critical thinking, decision-making skills, and gender-based violence. Participants were educated about gender rights and awareness, and sexual and reproductive health rights-related issues, to change values regarding gender roles by changing power dynamics and gender-based division of labor. In the livelihoods intervention, girls received training on computers and learned about possible income-earning options using mobile-based applications, photography, health, and entrepreneurship.

All girls participating in the BALIKA program met weekly with young female mentors with the assistance of a teacher affiliated with the school and peers in safe, girl-only locations called BALIKA centers. Particular thought was put into the location of centers, given concerns about girls' safety and security. The teachers and mentors were the primary link between the program and the community and were role models for adolescent girls. Activities helped girls develop friendships, receive training on new technologies, and acquire the skills they need to navigate the transition from girlhood to adulthood. ICT-based tools and digital learning materials played a critical role in the project. Other examples of activities offered were access to health or other services, distribution of stipends, sports, and cultural activities, or

community services. Community mobilization activities also provided awareness among community members about the causes and consequences of child marriage. Parents (mothers, fathers, guardians, in-laws) of girls and other community leaders were targeted as important gatekeepers and decision-makers.

Results: A randomized control trial found a significant reduction in the likelihood of child marriage as well as increased positive health, educational, economic, and social outcomes for girls, including building their confidence. Girls participating in the program were more likely to 1) attend school; 2) have improved mathematical skills if they received education support and gender-rights awareness training.; and 3) one-third more likely to be earning an income if they received gender-rights awareness or livelihoods-skills training. Girls who were in school were also more likely to report working in higher-status jobs after the intervention. Girls that participated in the BALIKA program also showed significant improvements against indicators such as knowledge (and confidence) that girls can say no to marriage, rejection of norms reinforcing gender-based violence, knowledge of STI and HIV transmission, and behaviors seeking reproductive health services, improvements were significantly higher in the villages that participated in the BALIKA program. Qualitative research suggests that girls gained confidence from the BALIKA centers to voice their opinions regarding the timing of marriage and choice of partner. There were no significant differences in outcomes between the three intervention arms, suggesting that the common elements of the program—community engagement, safe spaces and use of locally recruited mentors and teachers—were instrumental to the changes in attitudes towards child marriage.

Source: Amin et al. (2016).

Moving the Needle in Target Outcome Areas

The majority of programs had an impact on workforce development outcomes such as the likelihood to be working, retained, or promoted (60.9%). Approximately half of the programs had a positive impact on livelihood outcomes such as establishing new income-generating activities, improving savings behavior, and investing in their small businesses (50%). Approximately half of the programs also included activities targeted at improving outcomes in health outcomes (e.g., reduced child marriage, HIV risk, or teenage pregnancy) (47.1%).

Program evidence from several gender-smart programs also demonstrated effects on gender-related outcomes, such as more egalitarian attitudes related to the division of household labor, increased mobility for girls and young women, and other more equitable social norms (62.5%). For a summary table of all reviewed programs and high-level outcome areas in which they produced significant effects for girls or young women, see Annex 1.

Only five out of 24 programs (20.8%) had a statistically significant impact on obtaining formal employment. Evaluations of the Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) in Liberia, Nepal, and Rwanda have generated some of the most robust evidence to date on employment program impacts for young women and support for the view that tailoring programs to address the gender-based barriers to employment can often be more effective in improving girls' outcomes. These

programs are examples of intentional gender integration through a holistic female-only program that positively affected formal employment, livelihoods, and other workforce development outcomes. The programs' thematic goals were related to both economic development and gender empowerment, with objectives to expand opportunities for young women, reduce the tendency toward early marriage and fertility, increase agency and self-esteem.

For example, the Adolescent Girls Employment Initiative (AGEI) in Nepal demonstrated positive and statistically significant effects on labor market outcomes with gender-sensitive approaches that used radio and newspaper ads specifically geared towards young women. Ads encouraged women to sign up for technical training in non-traditional trades, such as mobile phone repair, electronics, or construction. The Nepal AGEI also partnered with women's and community-based organizations to attract applications from young women from marginalized groups, offering approximately USD 1 as an incentive for each successful referral of women or other vulnerable group members. After 40 hours of business skills training, participants engaged in another 40 hours of life skills training, with content tailored to women's needs such as negotiation skills, dealing with discrimination, work rights education, and sexual and reproductive health.

Assessing Risk and Opportunities in the Labor Market

Soft skills programs can also improve their overall intervention design by conducting gender and labor market assessments in order to understand the barriers young women face in achieving successful workforce outcomes. In Liberia and Nepal, the AGI intentionally sought to promote adolescent girls' and young women's transition to productive employment in their context. Labor market assessments (LMA) were critical for program leaders' understanding of workforce development risks and opportunities before designing the intervention strategies.

Trends, informal practices, and formal rules influence youth workforce outcomes and may shape policy advocacy objectives for those interventions targeting the enabling environment. At a macroeconomic level, scarce local opportunities and employer bias against young people and women leave many unemployed or underemployed in low-quality jobs. Available positions are often situated within 'masculine' and 'feminine' domains of work, with social norms and biases, mirrored at the macro-level and even reflected in discriminatory laws.² This can translate to female participants acquiring valuable skills but finding little market opportunity to enact them.

Other policies that restrict program graduates from employment include child labor laws. While labor legislation typically exists as a protection, it also skews the likelihood of evaluated programs achieving "successful outcomes" over short evaluation timelines, as many participants were yet ineligible to work. For example, graduates of Program for the Future Mozambique (PPF-MZ) were prevented from seeking employment before the age of 19 years (Brady, K. et al., 2013). While one of the project's expected short-term outcomes was increased

² See, for example, World Bank (2018). *Women, Business, and the Law*. Washington, DC.

employment, labor policies prevented adolescent girls and boys from age 15 to 18 from working. For this reason, target outcomes should be realistic, achievable, and aligned with the local context. In many countries, measuring educational attainment, acquisition of soft skills, and "employability" may be a more appropriate goal for this age group than formal employment. Conducting an LMA at the outset of program design ensures that any constraints and opportunities unique to the local economy are understood and leveraged to the extent possible (see Box 3).

Box 3: Conducting a Labor Market Assessment

In the design phase, youth skills programs should conduct a **labor market assessment** that considers:

- The fastest-growing sectors in that economy, representing opportunities to stimulate job creation and avoid displacement of existing workers;
- The capacity of the formal sector to realistically absorb newly-skilled human capital, i.e., skill shortages in specific local businesses, and where possible, the intention of employers to hire entry-level workers within the timeframe of the intervention (or shortly thereafter);
- Sectors where working youth are already concentrated, including those who are self-employed and/or participating in the informal economy—the sector employing the most youth globally;
- Cultural and gender norms perpetuating occupational segregation within the labor market, as well as government policies that restrict or permit women or young adults from participating in specific industries or roles;
- Different skills needed for special settings, e.g., provisions for post-conflict or refugee youth without the same legal status or access to labor markets;
- For multinational projects, different gender needs and cultural expectations by region, e.g., the essential skills for young women in MENA may differ from those in SSEA. Consider cross-cultural psychology and highly valued traits in implementation areas.

Based on the LMA, program implementers should review and analyze evidence for soft skill linkages to jobs in demand. Specific sectors may necessitate skills particular to an industry job or function, such as building a compelling presentation for those who will work in a technologically driven workplace or achieving precision and effective time management for agribusiness employees. Specific skills may also be more salient for individual countries or sectors. This is especially true if the economy presents high informality, demanding youth be equipped for self-employment rather than “job ready” for employment with a firm. For example, it is essential to differentiate between assets an Indian woman needs to secure a job in the formal power sector, which has historically been dominated by men, and those she needs to succeed as an off-grid energy micro-entrepreneur. Targeting “job readiness” to enter a non-traditional formal setting for young women might require healthy positive self-concept and communication skills, while skills for entrepreneurial success demand personal initiative,

creativity, and resilience in the face of barriers, like accessing less start-up capital than male entrepreneurs (Glinski & Martin, 2019).

Box 4: Positive Effects on Workforce Outcomes from Procajoven in Panama

Proof Point 3: Procajoven

Objective: Procajoven is a labor training program in Panama designed to improve prospects for unemployed young people from disadvantaged groups.

Activities: Financed by the government, the Procajoven program provides two to three months of classroom vocational training courses at private training centers in Panama. As contracted vendors, the centers provide demand-driven training job orientation and facilitate job placement activities. The program also requires each training center to submit with its course proposals proof that they have consulted firms in efforts to ensure the skills taught reflect demands within the sector. The professional courses prepare young people for entry-level occupations such as waiters, accountants, or beauty stylists. Classroom training also typically includes one to three months of training in soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and task planning. Participants are then engaged in internships for one to three months, while staff from training centers continue to provide supervision and assistance. Small stipends defray the costs of participants' travel, food, medical coverage, and workplace insurance.

Results: Using a quasi-experimental design, evaluation of Procajoven aimed to isolate the effects different training components, by comparing the effects of two program modalities: one with classroom training in technical *and* soft skills plus an internship, and another that *only* offered training in soft skills plus an internship of longer duration. Results found the modality that excluded technical training had more significant effects on youth employment, suggesting that technical training in the classroom does not generate net positive impacts exceeding the "lock-in" effects of removing youth from the labor market to attend a more extended training. This is similar to other job training programs in Latin America, where impact evaluations have found that youth *only* receiving soft skills training have superior results compared to those participating in soft and technical skills training.³

Gender analysis: Procajoven produced more significant effects for women than men in workforce outcomes such as the probability of finding a job, an increase in weekly working hours, and an increase in income levels. However, stronger recorded impacts on women in LMICs may reflect their higher rate of *unemployment* and/or lower *quality* of jobs at the baseline. Furthermore, while women experienced greater overall effects on employment, they tended to transition to informal jobs, while urban men benefitted the most from gains in *formal employment*, as indicated by securing a job that provides health insurance, a

³ Cited in González-Velosa et al. (2012), Martínez (2011) similarly uses data from Dominican Republic's Juventud y Empleo, finding that participants randomly assigned to a modality offering training in soft and technical skills plus an internship, had equal or inferior results to those receiving only training in soft skills plus an internship.

pension, and/or family benefits.

Source: Ibararán and Rosas-Shady (2007), cited in González-Velosa et al. (2012).

As the Afghanistan Workforce Development program illustrates, job training programs that conduct a labor market assessment and address the gender-based barriers are likely to produce positive outcomes for young women. However, among other TVET programs, a disconnect between the labor market demand and the skills of trainees continues to impact positive workforce development outcomes, especially for young women who face added bias and barriers. Traditional job training programs can benefit from a comprehensive labor market assessment, including a more in-depth investigation of gender as it is performed and upheld in society and the labor force.

Stopping at Skills

Just as intervention models vary for youth programs that deliver soft skills, the degree of gender integration also varies. At a minimum, programs should collect sex-disaggregated data on participation and performance. However, this was also not always tracked in the implementation of many job training programs, thereby obscuring gender differences in uptake and outcomes. If gender dimensions are captured and considered in evaluations, the reasons for differences are rarely well interpreted.

Integrating gender into the intervention itself may take place during program design or later as needs arise. Gender-sensitive strategies were implemented in several programs by providing a safe space for girls, mentorship, transport subsidies, and psychosocial support to address gender-based violence. Education programs often recognized adolescent girls' and boys' different needs, and sometimes addressed household-level gender barriers that drive gaps in access, for instance, by speaking to parents about the value of educating girls. When workforce programs address gender, they tend to only focus on increasing young women's program *participation*, providing young women with resources in the form of skills training, group formation, or financing. Theories of change rarely aim to change gender norms and economic inequalities that reproduce gender gaps in access to these resources.

While **gender-smart** (aware, sensitive, responsive) programming takes into account different needs and existing gender inequalities, truly **gender-transformative** programming aims to transform the attitudes, behaviors, and structures that reproduce harmful gender norms and social inequalities.

Most workforce interventions do not seek to rectify the underlying environmental and demand-side factors contributing to young women's different economic starting points and roles, even though these impact their likelihood of maintaining productive economic activities in the long term. Gender-transformative programming may be implemented less frequently due to the complexity of involving other actors at multiple levels (households, cultural leaders, employers, policymakers), which implies more coordination, higher costs, and more significant time requirements. It may also be avoided due to greater potential for backlash, as participants and

program implementers may face resistance if “women’s empowerment” messages and activities are not effectively delivered through a household and community benefits approach.

Different Realities for Women and Men

While many young people struggle to secure employment in LMICs with an oversupply of low-skilled labor, female youth tend to face different personal, household, and workplace obstacles to leveraging new skills than their male counterparts. Soft skills acquisition may not translate to access to further vocational training or educational opportunities. Family priorities and financial constraints may be reflected in unequal investment in higher education for male and female youth. Community expectations and cultural views of young women can also affect program graduates' openness or internal motivation to seek education or employment. Even if young women possess high capabilities in terms of educational attainment and vocational or technical skills, they may still feel less efficacious to secure formal employment.

Young women may also not be entering the workforce with equal confidence or success rates as young men. For example, in most industrialized countries, there are inverse gender gaps in education, with more girls enrolling and outperforming boys and more young women graduating than young men (Fortin et al., 2014). In such instances, women may have higher academic and technical proficiencies, yet lag in transitioning to the labor force and face greater obstacles along the employment pathway. Socialization plays a strong role in this bottleneck from school to work. In many societies, girls are encouraged to be *competent* while boys are encouraged to be *confident*. Boys tend to develop self-control later than girls, which gives girls greater competency in academic settings (Duckworth et al., 2015) as they study more rigorously and earn higher grades on average (Ablard & Lipschulz, 1998). Behaviors associated with testosterone such as aggression, competition, and risk-taking (Eisenegger et al. 2011) may also contribute to boys' underperformance in school. These behaviors are often rewarded later in the workplace when men demonstrate them. As adults in the labor force, young women tend to face penalties for showing these same attitudes and behaviors, (Phelan & Rudman, 2010) and are subjected to sexism, pay gaps and other inequalities at work related to motherhood (Koch et al., 2014).

There are also inverse gender gaps in favor of women in relation to some soft skills, such as social skills. On average, women score higher than men on assessments of social perception, a skill that predicts performance on teams (Sustein & Hastie, 2014). Women have been found to exercise different management styles than men that are more conducive to productivity, although this varies by region and context. For example, women managers in the US have been shown to build more relationships with their employees, communicate with subordinates more effectively, and have more engaged employees overall (Fitch & Agarwal, 2014). Women and men may seem to “naturally” develop these certain traits and competencies, which are concentrated in varying levels in different regions. However, it is conditioning to gender norms, and differential valuation of traits and behaviors, that lead to differences in the soft skills likely needed for a young woman and young man to secure the same job—such as confidence and self-efficacy, or openness to risk. For example, a 2011 study of noncognitive skills found that a

man's occupational attainment is most closely related to his locus of control, while a woman's attainment is associated with her openness to experience (Cobb-Clark & Tan, 2011). While much research on gender differences in occupational attainment has focused on professionals in high-income countries, this nonetheless reveals the importance of assessing and tailoring skills training content to meet specific gender needs in context.

Gender-Smart Soft Skills Programs May Still Fail Women

While research shows that soft skills are necessary for successful workforce outcomes, acquiring these skills is not sufficient for young women to succeed. It is critical to address the structural and contextual barriers that may impact effective outcomes. The AGI pilot in Jordan tested the direct impact of training in a subset of life skills focused on employability among community college female graduates. Participants received a wage subsidy voucher, soft skills training, both, or nothing. A rigorous impact evaluation of the intervention found that the life skills training had no average impact on employment (one year later), although there was a weakly significant impact outside the capital city (Groh et al., 2012). The life skills training *did* improve positive thinking and mental health among participants. Reasons the life skills training did not improve work outcomes in Jordan were unconfirmed, although structural issues in the labor market presumably interfered with project effectiveness.

Several other programs integrated gender-smart activities within WFD programming, yet still demonstrated poor results on work outcomes (e.g., no change in employment or labor income) given the challenges of depressed labor markets. For example, the Haiti AGI stressed gender-informed safety and security strategies throughout the design and implementation due to high risks of physical assault, and particularly sexual violence (Rodella, Cuevas, Ayuesta, 2015). The project implemented different approaches to address safety and security issues, such as 1) reducing exposure to risk of assault by providing training within a 30-minute commute of participants' residences; 2) conducting training during the day; 3) sensitizing trainers to working with vulnerable women and identifying abuse; 4) providing mentors who were sensitized on violence prevention, referrals, and accompanying young women to request services or assistance related to violence; and 5) using cell phones for communication and stipend payments. Information communication technologies (i.e., mobile money, SMS-based motivation, and SMS-based job search surveys) were also used to encourage young women with their job searches. Results of the Haiti AGI demonstrated high program retention rates and positive gender-related outcomes like decreased acceptance of violent behavior. It also enhanced the *employability* of young women by improving both technical and soft skills like agency, markers of workforce readiness, and predictors of better labor market performance. Young women changed the types of work that they performed; however, earnings did not increase in the short-term evaluation.

This finding is related to the specific challenges young women faced in securing employment, such as being repeated targets of sexual advances during their job searches, with sexual favors held as a price of an application or referral to the relevant person. Sexual harassment was a pervasive obstacle for those seeking jobs and those who managed to secure one. Qualitative research triangulated that young women felt degraded and depressed by sexual propositions,

as such incidents were perceived to devalue their skills. While the Haiti AGI was found ineffective, it did provide a more in-depth context analysis of the challenges faced by vulnerable youth, particularly young women, in accessing labor markets and exercising their agency. For good practice in similar contexts, community mobilization may be needed for challenging social norms, increasing the perceived value of young women, and sensitizing on the harms of sexual harassment. The risk of ‘failure’ may be mitigated by addressing not only GBV, but also security issues, transportation, and childcare.

The linkage between acquiring skills and translating them into productive work outcomes is not seamless or straightforward to measure. Soft skills for youth may serve as an intermediary strategy between learning and earning. In other words, skills are a prerequisite for work *readiness*, but not a guarantor of work *outcomes*. The heterogeneity of evidence on training that does, or does not, lead to work outcomes reflects the diverse packages of skills and supports provided, and the range of economies into which young women and men enter upon completion. To strengthen future theories of change, more research is needed to: (1) assess and address the particular structural challenges women face in the program context, (2) understand the mechanisms through which soft skills training can synergize with macroeconomic realities to improve youth work outcomes, and (3) improve the instruments used to isolate soft skills and measure the impact of non-cognitive training packages.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that girls and young women learn soft skills best through a combination of classroom training and practical application (Dusenbury, et al., 2015). Overall, the evidence suggests that programs must target factors within a girl’s environment that influence her capacity to improve her life outcomes. Gender norms—which are culturally acceptable definitions of roles, behaviors, rights, and opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys— both shape and reflect societal conditions of inequality.⁴ They have the potential to constrain young people’s opportunities, often limiting adolescent girls’ decision-making and autonomy, freedom of mobility and communication, and employability.⁵ Unequal allocation of resources like income and education particularly impact women and girls, strongly correlating with their lower social status, poor health, and compromised well-being. **Gender-smart programming takes this into account and seeks to address the different needs of male and female participants. Truly gender-transformative programming extends further to transform the attitudes and behaviors that reproduce harmful gender norms and social inequalities.**

Many soft skills programs are helping close gender gaps in education, livelihoods, and the workforce. Results from program evaluations showed evidence of success across numerous

⁴ Cultural beliefs and practices related to the role of motherhood often influence the norms and behaviors that men and women adopt in society. Gender roles are regarded and valued differently, giving rise to gender inequalities that are reflected in institutions, perpetuating the lower status of women. As unequal power relations exacerbate inequalities, the empowerment of women in the community, and engagement of men in programming can help to shift the power balance, yielding more equitable outcomes in education and workforce development.

⁵ The authors recognize that in different ways, gender norms and stereotypes may also restrict boys and young men, for example, those who wish to join female-dominated sectors or participate to a larger degree in family life.

outcomes. Programs that targeted all four feature domains tended to be youth empowerment or PYD programs. With a *socio-ecological* lens, successful soft skills interventions focused not just on trainees but also addressed additional levels of the broader enabling environment.

Although young people globally can benefit from the acquisition of soft skills, what works programmatically for girls and young women varies widely across contexts. Soft skills programming should be designed to address factors specific to a particular context. Where norms are harmful, multi-level interventions may engage communities to transform these norms and mitigate associated risks, for example by working at the household and community level to eliminate early marriage or unequal investment in girls and boys.

Evidence on success factors is strong enough to warrant investment in proven key features.

The programs included in this review demonstrate a variety of ways to effectively leverage soft skills programs in different contexts. Combining soft skills training with an internship, apprenticeship, or other work experience is essential for integrating learning and developing social capital. On-the-job training and practical learning opportunities can help youth enact skills as they reflect on experiences with a peer, teacher, mentor, or supervisor. A private sector that can articulate its skill needs is invaluable to program designers aiming to harmonize demand with young people's interests and emerging occupational aspirations, in both the formal and informal economy. Moreover, to achieve sustainable workforce development outcomes for vulnerable youth, programs should integrate gender-smart strategies that anticipate the unique needs of young women in their contexts, including intentionally addressing the cultural, structural, and macro-economic barriers that may impede their success.

When evaluating youth programs, short-term gains (or lack of gains) in workforce outcomes may not be the best indicator of program success. Most available studies present short-term findings with limited generalizability or insight on longer-term workforce outcomes and impacts on youth. Very few programs, either in the United States or other countries, conduct long-term follow-up evaluations after the intervention has been completed to determine maintenance of workforce effects, and whether impacts on participants are sustained, increase, or diminish over time. Those that do evaluate after two or more years may offer evidence of potential "sleeper effects" of training programs, which emerge only on a longer time horizon as youth enter adulthood and encounter more scenarios in which to practice soft skills and secure gainful employment. Unfortunately, for many women in LMICs, this may be too late, as a lack of supports to defray care responsibilities and other unpaid work compels them to leave the labor force altogether by early adulthood. Others find that effects have dissipated; for example, an evaluation of the Job Corps program in the US found a significantly positive short-run effect on both genders but little or no long-run effect (Schochet, McConnell, Burghardt, 2003). For these reasons, longitudinal studies of soft skills interventions should be a high priority on the international youth research agenda.

Key Recommendations

For Practitioners

1. **Target four key soft skills:** communication skills, positive self-concept, higher-order thinking skills, and self-regulation. These are the skills that are most closely associated with improvements in participants' rates of employment, performance and promotion, wage income, and entrepreneurial success.
2. **Create a safe space,** particularly for marginalized populations. Safe spaces serve as an important venue for education and training on a variety of sensitive topics such as sexual health and gender-based violence. Single-prong programs (e.g., solely financial literacy, solely health education) are less effective for empowering girls than those that combine interventions and create spillover effects into other domains. Therefore, programs may offer soft skills training alongside lessons sexual health and rights, followed by modules on financial literacy and savings education. Especially when training vulnerable girls and young women, offering sex-segregated classrooms or other safe spaces may better enable them to absorb and integrate content free from intimidation or shame.
3. **Provide complementary assets and training** on financial literacy, technical, livelihoods, or entrepreneurial skills where participants can encounter real scenarios to practice soft skills.
4. **Provide practical learning opportunities** for youth to reinforce the variety of skills acquired. Young people learn by doing. Participants will require a range of opportunities to build and practice new skills and competencies, as well as support for their continued development. Linking participants with mentors, internships, and entry-level work opportunities can meet this need.
5. **Build the social capital of girls in ways that enhance their capabilities and reinforce broader programmatic aims.** Youth-led activities and peer support groups can improve social networks, enable girls and young women to share their experiences with their peers, grow confidence in exercising emerging leadership skills, and enhance their access to information.
6. **Target the enabling environment** to address the gender-based barriers to education and workforce development programs that girls and young women encounter in their households and communities. Programs show greater effectiveness when they specifically intervene with participants' parents, brothers, and husbands.
7. **Related, work with boys and men to change gender norms.** Meaningful male engagement advances gender equality by transforming patriarchal social norms that harm both women and men. When girls' empowerment interventions invite boys and men to identify and reflect on gender inequalities, new opportunities emerge for positive norm change.
8. **Conduct a labor market assessment,** especially for traditional TVET programs, so skills development opportunities align with private sector needs. The structure of labor markets, which varies between cities and rural areas, limits the overall employment impact of youth training programs. In LMICs, where an oversupply of labor is prevalent,

opportunities to enter the workforce reflect the pace of economic and structural transformation. It is therefore vital to ensure courses are relevant to participants by assessing participant skill needs and interest in participating in different value chains, including in the informal economy.

9. **Address structural barriers.** Labor force participation also reflects gender inequality, the skills women can attain before entrance, and the beliefs and laws that dictate which are acceptable roles for women and men. Therefore, comprehensive interventions that address both supply and demand of labor tend to be most effective for workforce outcomes. Soft skills programs are not likely to have sustainable impacts on youth as they become adults without complementary strategies to dismantle or work-around the (educational, financial, workplace, legal) barriers that limit women's economic participation.
10. **Design and implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies** that are likely to increase young women's awareness and participation in programs. Provide incentives for implementing organizations to address these access barriers and improve gender parity in enrollment and retention rates.
11. **Develop gender-smart M&E frameworks.** Across the project cycle, a gender lens enables smarter design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives to empower adolescents. Programs can monitor and analyze sex-disaggregated data to understand how young women and young men participate in and benefit differently from various soft skills interventions. A suggested bank of *Gender-smart Program Indicators* by specific outcome area is provided in Annex 2.

For Researchers

1. **Track gender-smart indicators** to understand differences when evaluating the processes, immediate outcomes, and long-term impacts of youth soft skills interventions. In numerous cases, monitoring and evaluation data were not disaggregated by sex; thus, programs overlooked valuable insights on differential access and outcomes between male and female participants.
2. **Conduct follow-up evaluations on a longer time horizon** to determine maintenance of effects. For programs tracking workforce outcomes, gains in employment may disappear in follow-up studies as acceleration to self-employment and wage labor may eventually be matched by non-trained peers. At the same time, positive impacts on job formality tend to grow over time, thus "sleeper effects" may also emerge later as youth encounter more opportunities to put skills into practice. There are tremendous insights to be gained by following youth cohorts to understand the long-term effects of interventions conducted in early and mid-adolescence. Currently, most longitudinal studies have been conducted in high-income countries. Rigorous longitudinal research is needed in LMICs that stratifies youth population demographically and investigates gender-differentiated impacts of interventions over time.
3. **Measure cost-effectiveness** so the most impactful soft skills programs can reach scale. Cost-effectiveness measures benefits such as returns to the national economy, added value to the private sector, and various social impacts. Quantifying social and economic

returns and communicating a program's "value for money" proposition can help youth organizations attract greater investment from public and private donors, including partner companies.

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Annex 1: Descriptive Summary Table

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS on Education, Workforce, or Livelihoods Outcomes							
Intervention Name	Research Organization	Country	Target Age	Participant Sex	Setting	Significant Positive Effects on Girls/Women in 3 Target Outcomes	Other Positive Outcomes
Akazi Kanoze 2 (Alcid & Martin, 2017)	EDC, Mastercard	Bangladesh	15-19	Female	School	✓ Workforce Outcomes	
GAP Inc. Personal Advancement and Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.) (Adhvaryu, A. et al., 2016).	GAP Inc.	India	20-29	Female	Workplace	✓ Workforce Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) (Ara and Das, 2010)	BRAC	Bangladesh	11-19	Female	Community	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Adolescent Girls Initiative – Kenya (Austrian et al., 2018)	Population Council	Kenya	11-15	Female	Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes
Adolescent Girls Initiative – Rwanda (Botea et al., 2015)	World Bank	Rwanda	16-24	Female	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
BALIKA (Amin et al., 2016)	EDC, Mastercard	Bangladesh	12-18	Female	School and Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) (Adoho et al., 2014)	World Bank	Liberia	15-19	Female	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Educate! (Educate!, 2014)	Educate!	Uganda	15-19	Both	School and Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes ✓ Workforce Outcomes	

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS on Education, Workforce, or Livelihoods Outcomes							
Intervention Name	Research Organization	Country	Target Age	Participant Sex	Setting	Significant Positive Effects on Girls/Women in 3 Target Outcomes	Other Positive Outcomes
Employment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) Program (Shahnaz & Karim, 2008)	BRAC	Bangladesh	10-24	Female	Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Employment Fund, Adolescent Girls Initiative – Nepal (Chakravarty et al., 2016)	World Bank	Nepal	15-19	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) Program (Bandiera et al., 2012; 2018)	BRAC	Uganda	15-19	Female	Community-based	✓ Livelihood Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Girls Education Program (Cadena et al., 2014)	Room to Read	Nepal	10-14	Female	School and Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes	
Girls' Education Programme (Alejocs et al., 2015)	Restless Development	Nepal	10-14	Female	School	✓ Education Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Ishraq Program (Selim et al, 2013)	Population Council	Egypt	10-14	Female	Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Project Rise (Manno et al., 2015)	MDRC	United States	18-24	Female	Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes	✓ Work Readiness
Wezesha Vijana Girls' Advancement Program (Asante Africa Foundation, 2017)	Asante Africa Foundation	Kenya and Tanzania	10-14	Both	School and Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS on Education, Workforce, or Livelihoods Outcomes							
Intervention Name	Research Organization	Country	Target Age	Participant Sex	Setting	Significant Positive Effects on Girls/Women in 3 Target Outcomes	Other Positive Outcomes
Education for Income Generation Project (USAID, 2013)	USAID	Nepal	16-35	Both	Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes
Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (USAID, 2018)	USAID	Afghanistan	20-30	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Skill Training for Advancing Resources (STAR Program) (Rahman et al., 2017)	BRAC	Bangladesh	14-18	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes
TESFA (Edmeades et al., 2014)	ICRW, CARE	Ethiopia	10-19	Female	Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Negotiating a Better Future – Zambia (Ashraf et al., 2013)	IPA	Zambia	15-19	Female	School	✓ Education Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
Samata (Beattie et al., 2015)	STRIVE	India	15-19	Both	School and Community-based	✓ Education Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes
A Ganar Alliance: (Partners of the Americas, 2015)	USAID	8 Countries in LAC	15-19	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes
Jordan New Opportunities for Women (Groh, M. et al., 2012)	World Bank	Jordan	15-19	Female	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes ✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes (mental health)
Jóvenes en Acción (Attanasio et al., 2011)	University College London	Colombia	20-29	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS on Education, Workforce, or Livelihoods Outcomes							
Intervention Name	Research Organization	Country	Target Age	Participant Sex	Setting	Significant Positive Effects on Girls/Women in 3 Target Outcomes	Other Positive Outcomes
Juventud y Empleo (Ibarrarán et al., 2014)	Inter-American Development Bank	Dominican Republic	16-29	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes (reduced pregnancy)
Juventud y Empleo (Acevedo, et al., 2017)	Inter-American Development Bank	Dominican Republic	16-29	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	
Juventud y Empleo (Ibarrarán et al., 2015)	Inter-American Development Bank	Dominican Republic	16-29	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	
Procajoven (Ibarrarán and Rosas-Shady, 2007)	Inter-American Development Bank	Panama	18-29	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	
Youth Economic Empowerment in Yemen (YEPP) (Bahnassi, K., 2016)	UNDP	Yemen	18-30	Both	Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes
entra 21 (Aluza et al., 2015)	IYF	Argentina	16-24	Both	Community-based	✓ Workforce Outcomes	
Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme – Zambia (Austrian et al., 2018)	Population Council	Zambia	10-19	Female	Community-based	✓ Livelihoods Outcomes	✓ Health Outcomes Work Readiness Outcomes

INEFFECTIVE PROGRAMS on Education, Workforce, or Livelihoods Outcomes							
Intervention Name	Research Organization	Country	Target Age	Participant Sex	Setting	(No Positive Effects on 3 Target Outcomes)	Other Positive Effects on Girls/Women
entra 21 (Aluza et al., 2007)	IYF	Argentina	16-24	Both	Community-based		
Jordan New Opportunities for Women (Groh, M. et al., 2016)	World Bank	Jordan	15-19	Female	Community-based		✓ Health Outcomes
Adolescent Girls Initiative – Haiti (Rodella et al., 2015)	World Bank and Nike Foundation	Haiti	17-21	Female	Community-based		✓ Health Outcomes ✓ Gender-related Outcomes ✓ Work Readiness Outcomes
Technogirl Pogramme (UNICEF, 2015)	UNICEF	South Africa	15-18	Female	School		✓ Work Readiness Outcomes
Summer Youth Employment Program (Modestino and Paulsen, 2019)	Internal	United States	14-24	Both	Community-based		✓ Work Readiness Outcomes
African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) (Abuya et al., 2013)	APHRC	Kenya	12-19	Female	School		
YouthPower Action – Mozambique (Brady et al., 2018)	USAID	Mozambique	15-19	Both	Community-based		✓ Health Outcomes
National Volunteer Service Program (NVSP) – Jordan (World Bank, 2019)	World Bank	Jordan	15-29	Both	Community-based		✓ Social Cohesion Outcomes

Gender-Smart Indicators for Soft Skills Program Monitoring and Evaluation

- Program-level monitoring data:
 - Participation (May reveal unequal access if the intervention is gender-blind in design, or may reflect recruitment targets if the intervention has a specific gender objective)
 - Young women's and young men's application rates to the soft skills training program (if applying)
 - Young women's and young men's selection/enrollment rates in the soft skills training program
 - Outputs
 - Young women's and young men's completion rates of the soft skills training program
 - Young women's and young men's acquisition rates of different skills (if monitored individually)
- Evaluation of participants' performance against intended outcomes:
 - Intermediate outcomes
 - Young women's and young men's demonstrated use of soft skills in achieving specific program objective (e.g., join college, launch enterprise, secure job, delay marriage, avoid HIV)
 - Long-term outcomes
 - Potential contributions of women's and men's performance to longer-term impact goal (e.g., workforce development, reduced child marriage, reduced HIV transmission rates)

By Specific Intended Outcomes

- Education outcomes:
 - Girls' and boys' improved literacy rates
 - Girls' and boys' reduced number of hours spent on unpaid work each week
 - Girls' and boys' enhanced engagement in school-level activities
 - Girls' and boys' increased completion rates of primary school
 - Girls' and boys' increased transition rates to secondary school
 - Young women's and young men's increased completion rates of secondary school or high school equivalency
 - Young women's and young men's increased transition rates to higher education
 - Share of women and men in different fields of higher education programs (define by context, with consideration of professional degree tracks and STEM fields where relevant)
 - Women's and men's increased completion rates of higher education programs
- Livelihoods outcomes:
 - Informal income-generating or subsistence activities
 - Young women's and young men's rates of initiating new informal activities or self-employment (indicated by their production or entrepreneurship and independent account work)
 - Young women's and young men's increased consumption of subsistence products
 - Young women's and young men's increased net earnings from labor income
 - Increase in number of young women and young men who expand their inventory or production
 - Financial activity
 - Increase in number of young women and young men who open and maintain a bank account
 - Improved savings behavior: Increased frequency and amount of savings by women and men
 - Increase in number of young women and young men who access debt, insurance, or other microfinance products
- Workforce outcomes:
 - Employment
 - Reduction in average time elapsed between women and men completing education/training

- and starting employment
- Increased rates of women and men *seeking* job opportunities (defined by context, with consideration of higher-paid roles, professional degree tracks and STEM fields where relevant)
- Young women's and young men's increased rates of formal employment (indicated by a job that provides health insurance, a pension, and/or family benefits)
- Increase in number of weekly hours worked by women and men
- Wages/labor income
 - Increase in earnings for male and female participants
- Performance
 - Increased likelihood that worker is retained and present
 - Increased worker productivity
 - Increase in women's and men's rates of promotion
 - Other function-specific indicators of achievement on the job
- Entrepreneurial success
 - Stage: Venture progressed from proof-of-concept to in-business
 - Formality: Business registered
 - Growth: Increased revenue, acquisition of new customers, attraction of new type or level of investment, increased number of women and men employed
 - Sustainability: Number of years in business

Other Predictive Indicators

- **Youth workforce readiness:**
 - Female and male participants may be **ready** for further education or work if they show improvement in:
 - Knowledge, attitudes, and other program learning indicators
 - Soft skills and empowerment indicators like confidence, self-efficacy, positive self-concept
 - Social assets, such as informal safety nets or government social protection services
 - Avoidance of "life's potential pitfalls" like early pregnancy or criminal activity
 - Economic assets such as financial literacy and the ability to save
- **Changes in gender norms and perceptions** that enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes in education, livelihoods, and/or employment for young women:
 - Girls and young women experience:
 - Improvement in knowledge, gender attitudes, acquisition of soft skills, and other program learning indicators
 - Shifting attitudes toward egalitarian division of household labor
 - Increased perception of their own mobility
 - Increased agency and bodily autonomy
 - Increased rate of declining early marriage
 - Shifting beliefs about girls' education, vocational training, and employability
 - Households show enhanced attitudes towards gender equality, such as:
 - Increased value and trust of girls
 - Decreased rates of arranging child marriage
 - Decreased acceptance of gender-based violence
 - Shifting beliefs about girls' education, vocational training, and employability
 - Shifting attitudes toward egalitarian division of household labor
 - Shifting beliefs about women's relationship to money
- **Related changes in adolescent health** that enable girls' empowerment:
 - Girls' and boys' improved levels of nutrition
 - Girls' and boys' improved hygiene knowledge and practices
 - Girls' and boys' increased knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights

- Girls' and boys' decreased infection rates of HIV and other STIs
- Decrease in teenage pregnancy
- Young women's and young men's improved levels of mental health

Annex 3: Categorizing Strength of Evidence

The rigor of a study is related to the reliability of its findings; thus, the confidence with which a desk review can draw conclusions depends on the strength of the evidence base. For this report, the team first sought out the highest rigor studies and ultimately considered any program report graded A1-C2 using the categorization below. The following grades were developed to assess the strength of available studies, with further recognition that researcher bias is best mitigated when they are conducted by an external party.

A1	Experimental study design that includes a control/ comparison group and individual-level randomization (Gold standard in impact evaluation)
A2	Experimental study design that includes control/ comparison group and cluster-level randomization (e.g., randomizes schools or communities)
B1	A quasi-experimental study design that includes a control/ comparison group but lacks randomization
B2	A quasi-experimental study design that lacks a control/ comparison group lacks randomization but includes methods such as time series or dose/response analysis
C1	Non-experimental study (usually called a program assessment) that uses pre/post analysis and follows individuals over time. Stronger if external but can also be conducted internally.
C2	Non-experimental study (program assessment) that uses pre/post analysis of cross-sectional data
D1	Research that does not track outcomes, e.g., a case study, qualitative study, assessment of the feasibility of implementation, or report on the quality of services. (Internal reports using program monitoring data are not considered reliable beyond triangulation)

Catalog of Search Combinations

The search terms below are grouped into three categories: **target population**, **intervention-related terms**, and **type of study**. These categories were linked by the connector “AND” in the initial search.

Target Population: youth* OR adolescent* OR teen* OR (young AND adult*) OR (young AND people) OR (early AND adult*) OR (young AND adult*) OR (young AND women)

Intervention: (soft AND skills) OR (life AND skills) OR (positive AND youth) OR (pre-employment AND skills) OR (problem AND solving AND skills) OR (transferable AND skills) OR (non-cognitive AND skills)OR transition* OR educ* OR employ* OR (job AND readiness) OR (work AND readiness) OR (college AND access) OR (workforce AND development) OR (positive AND behavi*) OR positive OR (*social AND skills) OR social* OR (social* AND development) OR psycho-social OR psychosocial OR socioemotional OR (social AND emotional) OR pro-social OR (moral AND development) OR (social AND change) OR mentor* OR well-being OR self-determination OR agency OR strengthening OR self-efficacy OR (strength* AND competence*) OR (strengths AND development) OR (social* AND competence) OR (mental AND health) OR resilience*

Type of Study: eval* OR impact OR study OR analys* OR outcom* OR result* OR stud* OR randomiz* OR (cluster AND analysis) OR research OR controlled OR development OR logistic OR model* OR framework* OR review OR strateg* OR proj* OR prog*

Specific Combinations

- Soft skills (and) youth (and) intervention (and) evaluation
- Soft skills (and) youth (and) project (and) evaluation
- Soft skills (and) adolescent (and) intervention (and) evaluation
- Soft skills (and) adolescent (and) project (and) evaluation
- Soft skills (and) adolescent (and) intervention (and) impact
- Soft skills (and) adolescent (and) project (and) impact
- Life skills (and) youth (and) project (and) evaluation
- Life skills (and) adolescent (and) project (and) evaluation
- Life skills (and) adolescent (and) project (and) impact
- Competencies strengthening(and) Youth (and) intervention (and) evaluation
- Competencies strengthening(and) Youth (and) project (and) evaluation
- Competencies strengthening(and) adolescent (and) project (and) impact
- Agency (and) youth (and) intervention (and) evaluation
- Agency (and) youth (and) project (and) evaluation
- Agency (and) youth (and) project (and) impact
- Enabling (and) adolescent (and) intervention (and) impact
- Enabling(and) youth (and) project (and) impact

Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) intervention (and) evaluation
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) project (and) evaluation
Workforce readiness (and) adolescent (and) project (and) impact
Soft skills (and) youth (and) intervention (and) United States
Soft skills (and) youth (and) program (and) United States
Agency (and) youth (and) program (and) United States
Soft skills (and) youth (and) program (and) Saudi Arabia
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) program (and) Saudi Arabia
Soft skills (and) youth (and) program (and) Mexico
Soft skills (and) youth (and) evaluation (and) Mexico
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) program (and) Mexico
Life skills (and) youth (and) program (and) China
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) program (and) China
Life skills (and) youth (and) program (and) India
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) program (and) India
Soft skills (and) youth (and) program (and) South Africa
Soft skills (and) youth (and) evaluation (and) South Africa
Workforce readiness (and) youth (and) evaluation (and) South Africa

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Initial Sourcing of Evidence

After running searches using the combinations above, a title and abstract review was conducted to screen peer-reviewed literature and gray literature. Results from the searches were exported to files that were used by reviewers to identify whether the documents fit the full inclusion criteria. Studies were excluded if they did not fit in the general inclusion criteria reflected the exclusion criteria.

General Inclusion Criteria for Peer-Reviewed Literature

Peer-reviewed published program reports and internal or external impact evaluations for interventions that can be described as “soft skill programs” as identified by key terms retrieved through search engines or key informants. Literature with information about the program aims, target population (including age), geographical location, stated outcomes and outputs, program strategy and duration, outcomes and methods used included in the descriptive analysis (these are required to answer the research questions). Only literature that is based on strong evidence and methods (based on coding system in Table 2) was included in the analysis, as required to answer key research questions. Programs offering systemic intervention approaches and/or particular gender insights were *not excluded* even if the target population did not fall precisely into the age range; any studies with findings analogous to secondary-age youth were included, with program descriptors noting the range and spread of the beneficiary population where possible.

Language: English was the primary search language, with capacity to support interpretation of studies in Hindi, Spanish or French as needed.

Date: Literature published after 1999.

General Inclusion Criteria for Gray Literature

Program (implementation) reports, assessments or studies, evaluation (impact evaluation, process evaluation) reports, and case studies that can be described as “soft skills programs” based on key terms retrieved through search engines or key informants.

Exclusion Criteria for Peer-Reviewed and Gray Literature

Evaluations not focusing on or reporting age-disaggregated data for youth (i.e. young people falling in an age range of approximately 16 to 29 years).

Literature lacking information about the program aims, target population (including age), geographical location, stated outcomes and outputs, program strategy and duration, outcomes and methods used.

Qualitative case studies and quality of services or feasibility studies (Rigor category D1) were excluded from search and removed from analysis as these types of studies will not

answer the primary questions listed under research objectives.

Annex 6: Additional Contributors and Interview Guide

The authors extend acknowledgment and warmest appreciation to the following consultative experts who contributed to this development of this report through interviews, document contribution, or both:

Expert	Role, Organization
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