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Regional Framework for Introducing Lifeskills Education to Promote the Health of Adolescents

*Based on Intercountry Meeting to Promote the
Incorporation of Lifeskills for Health of Adolescents
into School Education*

Bangkok, Thailand, 5 -9 June 2000

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MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

LIFESKILLS education recognizes the need to address the psychological and social needs of young people to help them to develop and grow in to well-adjusted adults. It is relevant to moulding effective responses to behaviour-related health problems of children and adolescents. It is a critical part of a comprehensive approach to health education and promotion. Through lifeskills education we can move towards more positive and holistic approaches to educate the new generation, and through them, future generations.

Today, our children live in a very complex environment. They are exposed to various channels of communication, such as television, the Internet and radio. The electronic media particularly have a strong influence on children and adolescents, outweighing the influence of parents and family in certain situations. Interaction with friends and pressure from peers and media advertisements exert a strong influence on growing children and adolescents. Parental influence in moulding moral and social values and the traditional school curriculum are seemingly becoming increasingly incapable of equipping people with the skills needed to face real life.

Lifeskills education is a process of improving a person's abilities to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Young people, both in school and out of school, should have the opportunity to be trained in lifeskills as it plays an important role in the promotion of health in its broadest sense, in terms of physical, mental and social well-being.

At the individual level, lifeskills education should be stressed, especially beginning at home and reinforced at school.

There is convincing evidence that a person's lifestyle has an important bearing on his or her health. Lack of exercise, a diet high in fat and cholesterol, tobacco use, alcohol and drug abuse cause serious health problems and premature death. Many of these conditions are rooted in habits acquired at a young age, including adolescence.

Since 1993, WHO, in close collaboration with UN Agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and UNFPA, has given technical support to the efforts of Member Countries in lifeskills education.

To move forward in our quest for better health for our people, a comprehensive lifeskills education package should be developed based on our rich experience and collective wisdom.

I hope that this Regional Framework for Lifeskills Education to promote Health of Adolescents will provide a practical guide to Member Countries in the South-East Asia Region to initiate or strengthen the incorporation of lifeskills education into their respective school education system. The prime focus is to strengthen our resolve to ensure healthy development of adolescents.

Dr Uton Muchtar Rafei
Regional Director

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INTRODUCTION

THE document 'Regional Framework for Introducing Lifeskills Education to promote Health of Adolescents' was developed on the basis of information shared, discussions held and the consensus reached during the Inter-country Meeting to Promote the Incorporation of Lifeskills Education for Health of Adolescents into School Education, Bangkok, Thailand, 5-9 June 2000. The meeting was organized by WHO/SEARO in collaboration with WHO/HQ, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the Department of Mental Health of the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand.

There were 16 participants, from nine countries of the Region. In addition to WHO staff from the South-East Asia Regional Office and headquarters, participants from UNICEF, UNFPA and UNESCO attended. (see Annex for the list of participants).

The workshop outcome includes plans of actions and recommendations for the development of lifeskills education in SEAR countries. In addition, a section containing guidelines for the development of a lifeskills initiative, based on the existing WHO guidelines on lifeskills education in schools, has been added. It is expected that this document will serve as a guide for lifeskills programme development at the country level in the South-East Asia Region.

This document is targeted at policy-makers, programme managers, curriculum developers, stakeholders from the ministries of education and health, other ministries, institutions, agencies and donors from the Member Countries of the Region.

The document is in two parts. Part I contains issues facing adolescents and lifeskills education in general and in SEAR countries in particular, a core set of lifeskills and recommendations. Part II is a planning framework for lifeskills education initiatives.

The document focuses on the development of lifeskills education for adolescents in schools. However, the concept can be adapted for younger

children and out-of-school children, as well as for adult education and as part of community development projects.

WHO/SEARO plans to promote joint efforts by UN agencies working to support lifeskills education in the Region. It is expected that WHO/SEARO, together with and other UN agencies in the Region will aim to support workshops to advance lifeskills education in those countries most prepared to implement a national action plan for coordinated, systematic approaches to facilitate young people's learning of lifeskills. This should inspire many other countries to take the issue of lifeskills education in schools and for out-of-school children as a serious national priority. The aim of lifeskills education is to enable adolescents in SEAR countries to deal with various challenges and make them healthy and capable adolescents.

Part 1

Lifeskills Education: Issues, Concepts, Development and Lessons Learned

1. CHALLENGES FACING ADOLESCENTS IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

There is growing recognition that many adolescents are not sufficiently prepared to deal with the demands of modern society. Traditional mechanisms for passing on lifeskills (e.g. family, community role models, cultural traditions) may no longer be adequate in many communities. The reasons given for this include the weakening of traditional support structures as urbanization breaks up the extended family. There is also the power of the media in shaping the development of youth and the rapid social changes that make the lives of young people, their expectations, values and opportunities so different from that of their parents. In addition, adolescents face increasing risks to their health and development, such as HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, stress, violence and suicide.

The school is expected to impart skills that are needed for its socialization of young people, to prepare young people for a productive and fulfilling life. However, the overemphasis on traditional academic subjects has resulted in many schools not being able to fulfil this role.

2. WHAT IS LIFESKILLS EDUCATION?

Lifeskills education is a unified and developmental approach to help children and adolescents learn how to deal with difficulties of daily life, growing up and risk situations. Through a long-term curriculum over a number of years of schooling, many diverse needs and problems can be addressed, based on the same underlying pedagogical approach – the learning and application of lifeskills. Lifeskills education is an essential component of health promotion. It is not a panacea for all problems, but is an important aspect for addressing

young people's needs in the face of a wide range of problems, including drug abuse, violence, HIV/AIDS and a wide range of needs, including the promotion safety, peace and human rights.

Article 29 of the Rights of the Child states the value of many of the issues that can be addressed in lifeskills education:

Article 29: 1 State parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.*
- The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations...*
- The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.*

Based upon the WHO definition of lifeskills¹ the participants agreed on a working definition of lifeskills for SEAR countries:

"Lifeskills for adolescents are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable them to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life within the family, community and cultural context of the South-East Asia Region"

3. CORE LIFESKILLS IDENTIFIED BY WHO

A list of 10 lifeskills, described as generic lifeskills for psychosocial competence, was identified by WHO as core lifeskills applicable across a wide range of contexts in daily life and risk situations.

¹ Lifeskills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. From: Lifeskills education in schools (WHO/MNH/PSF/97.Rev.3)

This list can serve as a guide for reflecting on what skills should be considered to be core lifeskills within each culture.

- self-awareness
- empathy
- communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- decision-making
- problem solving
- creative thinking
- critical thinking
- coping with emotions
- coping with stress

4. PRINCIPLES FOR THE APPLICATION OF LIFESKILLS EDUCATION

Many initiatives aim to develop lifeskills education, yet fail to develop efficient skills-based programmes. There is a tendency to recreate traditional programmes packaged as lifeskills education. To avoid this, all lifeskills initiatives need to start with a clear definition and conceptual framework of what lifeskills education is about and how it can be achieved.

If the WHO/SEARO definition is taken as a starting point for discussion, it helps to adapt the definition to create national working definitions for lifeskills. It is also important to clearly define the overall objectives and goals of lifeskills education. During the training process, a meaningful definition is important at all levels. It can help to create definitions appropriate for teachers, politicians, parents, young people etc. Such definitions are written in terms acceptable and understood by each group.

Lifeskills education differs from conventional approaches to teaching health and other social interventions in schools. It is a student-centred, participatory process of learning and applying new skills in a supportive classroom environment. This approach reinforces existing educational programmes. Lifeskills learning may be introduced as part of a whole package

of initiatives to promote health and learning in school, or it may be introduced as a way to combine or strengthen existing initiatives. Lifeskills are taught and learned in the same way as other skills. They need to be tried and tested in easy, low risk situations, first, to create the conditions necessary for positive results from the practise of skills. For example, learning communication skills often begins with learning to speak clearly and take turns during a conversation. This can be applied to dealing with day-to-day situations in the classroom. Communication skills are then applied to more difficult situations with some element of risk (e.g., risk of hurting the other person's feelings), such as refusing an offer of help when it is not needed. Once students are comfortable with communication skills in low and medium risk situations, they are ready to practise the application of skills in risk situations, such as learning to refuse the offer of a cigarette.

Lifeskills can be applied in a wide variety of contexts, for example learning to make decisions related to road safety, friendships, school work, smoking, AIDS-related behaviour etc. Learning skills in this way have a positive effect in constantly reinforcing the skill that is being learned. Each lesson reinforces learning in previous lessons and lays the foundation for future lessons. In this way, lifeskills education can be developed over time as a spiral developmental curriculum.

Learning to apply lifeskills is an essential part of addressing underlying factors which influence behaviour in risk situations. However, skills learning needs to be complemented by information and efforts to promote positive values and attitudes.

Lifeskills learning can be incorporated in the school curriculum in a number of ways. Normally, two basic options are debated- should lifeskills education be incorporated as (or within) a subject area, or infused across existing subjects? For the sake of achieving a high level of commitment and fidelity to lifeskills education, it is frequently seen to be important to develop it as a subject or as a unified part of an existing subject. Experience suggests that where lifeskills learning has only been infused across the curriculum, it is typically not given priority and is soon neglected in favour of academic subjects. For a comprehensive approach, lifeskills learning can be both incorporated as a subject area and infused across different subjects.

Achieving such a shift in the school curriculum is a major initiative involving a wide range of stakeholders at national and local levels. On the one

hand, it requires policy level support and collaboration across a number of government and nongovernmental organizations. On the other, it requires collaboration between schools, parents and the community. For teachers, lifeskills education may introduce many novel experiences – new methodology, new content areas and perhaps a whole new way of approaching student-teacher, student-student, teacher-other school staff, and teacher-parents interactions. For school staff, lifeskills education may build a new educational culture in the school, including new relationships with parents and the community. A supportive environment for children to practise lifeskills is needed not only at school but also at home, from parents and from other community members. Initial problems may cause teachers to lose confidence and stop implementing the process, which is why it is so important to train teachers and provide support structures to help them deal with the difficulties in adjusting to lifeskills education.

5. LIFESKILLS EDUCATION OUTSIDE SEAR COUNTRIES

Natio nal lifeskills education initiatives selected from different regions of the world are briefly described below:

Zimbabwe

Lifeskills education was developed in Zimbabwe as a holistic, empowering and long-term approach to AIDS education in primary and secondary schools. The programme is designed to facilitate the development of positive attitudes and behaviours, to better equip students to avoid HIV infection and AIDS. The AIDS Action Programme is a national initiative developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNICEF. (The lifeskills initiative in Zimbabwe was awarded UNAIDS recognition for best practice in HIV/AIDS prevention education in schools, 1998).

Colombia

In Colombia, lifeskills education is part of the strategic Health Promotion Plan of the Ministry of Health. It has been developed as a contribution to integral education, which aims to provide students with education about dealing with life. Pilot tests in the first phase of the project lead to positive results and further dissemination of the initiative to a large number of schools in different parts of Colombia.

Viet Nam

The lifeskills initiative in Viet Nam is part of the UNICEF Mekong Subregion STD/HIV/AIDS project – The Mekong Partnership – for which one of the priorities is behavioural change and development communication initiatives, including lifeskills for in and out-of-school youth. The national initiative in Viet Nam is a lifeskills-based approach to HIV/AIDS prevention. To date, it has been developed and implemented in primary schools.

Iceland

In Iceland, lifeskills education is being developed as a subject in compulsory school education. The National Centre for Education Materials is preparing lifeskills education materials for schools. The aim is to create a holistic lifeskills education programme covering key areas defined as part of the goals and objectives of the national curriculum: health/healthy living, psychology, environment and creativity.

6. LIFESKILLS EDUCATION INITIATIVES IN THE SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

Participants expressed a desire to learn about what each country was doing to develop lifeskills education and sharing lessons learned. Sharing experiences was seen as an opportunity to generate new ideas and strategies. Participants also wished to identify clear and practical strategies for intercountry collaboration.

Summaries of the key points about lifeskills initiatives presented at the intercountry meeting are provided below. Information is provided from the SWOT Analysis (to map out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for the different initiatives, as well as from discussions and presentations of the action plans and technical needs for each country.

Bangladesh

To support the incorporation of lifeskills education into school education in Bangladesh, there are plans to include lifeskills education in health and education policies. Key partners for a national initiative need to be identified and trained, and resources need to be allocated for lifeskills education. Collaboration needs to be established with WHO and other UN agencies to assist in the development of a lifeskills initiative. Sharing of experiences with

other countries of the Region is also essential. The action plan includes a project to generate awareness of lifeskills education amongst adolescents using the media.

Bhutan

Reform of the school curriculum in Bhutan has involved a shift in the teaching-learning process from didactic to experiential learning. This reform, the New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE) has been expanded to introduce the concept of wholesome education, an approach which focuses on all-round development of the student by providing opportunities to learn the skills required for a productive life. Currently work is under way to develop materials and training for a lifeskills approach to reproductive health and drug education.

Strengths/opportunities in Bhutan include the existence of a comprehensive school health programme into which lifeskills education could be incorporated. Weaknesses/threats include the lack of human and other resources.

The action plan includes advocacy for lifeskills education with high -level officials and the production of a concept paper on lifeskills education in Bhutan, including a description of the concepts, objectives and strategies for lifeskills development. Technical support is needed to set up the lifeskills initiative. One of the first steps will be an orientation workshop for programme developers and partners. The action plan outlines the process of development of materials and training as the basis of a pilot project in schools.

India

A number of pilot projects have been carried out by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMHANS), Bangalore and by other groups in different parts of the country, suggesting the feasibility and value of lifeskills education in Indian schools.

Strengths/opportunities of the Indian lifeskills initiative include: active inter-ministry collaboration, media support, support from NGOs, expertise available for training of trainers and availability of relevant teaching manuals. Weaknesses/threats include difficulties in institutionalising lifeskills education, lack of funds, a large number of adolescents not attending school, and poorly trained teachers.

There is a need to generate greater political support and commitment for lifeskills education. Further study is required to determine how effective lifeskills programmes for behaviour change can be designed to be sensitive and meaningful across diverse cultures and religions.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) plans to review the curriculum for elementary and secondary school education with an aim to incorporate lifeskills modules within the existing curriculum. To promote political will, the creation of a pressure group is envisaged, and an opinion survey is planned to generate media and public support. An advisory body involving major stakeholders is to be established, and a team of master trainers needs to be formed. A pilot project is planned to test the materials that have been developed. Project activities aim to develop a skills-based approach to address a number of issues, including population and sustainable development, gender equality, adolescent reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and family.

Indonesia

“Lifeskills education for healthy life- Modules for Primary Schools and Secondary Schools” were developed in Indonesia by the Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF. The programme was designed to promote healthy living to help students solve health problems and to encourage students to show responsible behaviour towards themselves, their family and the environment. It was initially implemented in elementary schools, then junior secondary schools, and, more recently, it is being expanded into senior secondary schools and Madrasah/Pesantren (Islamic-based schools). The programme was developed on the basis of collaboration among the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, teachers’ unions, teachers’ institutions and universities.

Strengths/opportunities of the Indonesian lifeskills initiative include a high level of political and donor support, institutionalisation of teacher-training, and support from teachers and local NGOs. Weaknesses/threats include teachers’ lack of knowledge of health issues and their difficulties in implementing the participatory methodology, lack of access to out-of-school adolescents and limited funding.

Plans include continued advocacy among decision-makers to increase political and financial support for lifeskills education. To help achieve this, a

workshop is planned to promote “lifeskills education for a healthy life” as a national programme. There are plans for ongoing development of materials and training, and the identification of indicators for studying the effectiveness of lifeskills education, based on easy-to-use evaluation tools.

Maldives

A five-year plan has been developed to begin the process of lifeskills education development and implementation in Maldives. This process started with an introductory workshop for selected head of schools and school health focal points in the country.

Strengths/opportunities include the commitment from the Ministry of Education to support the introduction of lifeskills education and active NGO involvement. Weaknesses/threats include the lack of expertise for developing the project and difficulties associated with introducing innovations into the current curriculum in secondary schools, which is based on a foreign curriculum.

To determine the next steps, meetings are required with stakeholders and an orientation workshop is planned to promote understanding and acceptance of lifeskills education. The workshop would include potential members of the two groups that would be set up to develop the lifeskills initiative – the Lifeskills Development Group and Advisory Panel. Plans include the review of existing curricula to explore possible entry points for lifeskills education. There is a need for expert support to assist a need assessment, to define strategies for lifeskills education in Maldives, and support the process of developing lifeskills programme materials and teacher training.

Myanmar

Since 1997, lifeskills education has been developed in Myanmar by the Department of Education Planning and Training of the Ministry of Education as part of a UNICEF supported initiative SHAPE (School-based Health Living and HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Project), that was started in 1993. This project was also supported by the Ministry of Health. It was first introduced in primary schools as part of general study courses (three periods per week). It was later developed for upper primary level, integrated as part of social studies classes (two periods per week). More recently, it has been developed as a co-curriculum subject in lower secondary schools (one period per week).

Strengths/opportunities include the experience of the Ministry of Education in implementing lifeskills and other education promotion programmes, close collaboration between the ministries of Health and Education, and active participation from UNICEF and NGOs. Weaknesses/threats include the lack of direction and commitment at the national level, lack of resources, and a low level of support from teachers and students.

Plans include a review meeting for the task force and curriculum development group - to review the steps taken and plan for the next steps for incorporating lifeskills education in schools. There are plans to extend the lifeskills project to other townships. There is a need to enhance collaboration with other lifeskills initiatives in the Region and to collaborate with international agencies working on lifeskills education.

Nepal

In Nepal, formal and non-formal education services emphasize health as an important component of school curricula at all levels, and as an important part of social study and science. Health and environmental education have been compulsory for grades six to eight of secondary level. Later, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS are also incorporated into school curricula for secondary schools.

Strengths/opportunities in Nepal include policy support to include a health subject in the school curriculum and NGO support. Weaknesses/threats include lack of expertise, lack of resources for material development, and cultural barriers to material related to sex education in schools.

There are plans to incorporate lifeskills education into the revised curriculum for grades 1-10. Actions required for achieving this include advocacy meetings to seek approval from higher level education authorities, and the creation of a Lifeskills Development Technical Committee and an Advisory Committee. Plans include the development, implementation and evaluation of lifeskills education materials and teacher training as a pilot test in one district. There is a need for more technical support to assist strategic planning and development of teaching materials and training.

Sri Lanka

The National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka developed a lifeskills curriculum in response to several studies indicating the role of lifeskills in helping young people deal with their needs and problems. The National Education Commission promotes the lifeskills curriculum as an initial foundation for actualising the Common National Goals and Common Competencies expected to be achieved through schooling. Common National Goals include active participation of the population, adaptation to change, and strength to face unforeseen and complex situations. Common competencies include thinking and listening skills, coherent speech, social relationships, cooperation and team work. To-date, lifeskills syllabus has been developed for grades 7,8 and 9. A group of master trainers has been trained and training workshops are being organized for secondary schools teachers.

Strengths/opportunities of the Sri Lankan initiative include support from policy-makers, the media, donors and NGOs. Weaknesses/threats include problems caused by the political situation in the country, other more pressing priorities, lack of funding, and the need for expertise.

Thailand

Lifeskills projects are being implemented countrywide in Thailand, both as curricular and extra-curricular activities. Lifeskills training has been set as a national education priority - the National Five-Year Development Plan states lifeskills training as an important strategy in public health and social development. A lifeskills curriculum has been developed for schools and a programme of training of trainers is being implemented. The school-based programme includes both generic lifeskills education and modules to develop the application of lifeskills specifically to HIV/AIDS and drug dependence. Currently work is under way to develop an evaluation tool for measuring the effectiveness of lifeskills education curricula in schools.

Strengths/opportunities of the Thai initiative include the countrywide network of agencies involved in lifeskills education, political and donor support, and incorporation of lifeskills education into the school curriculum. Weaknesses/limitations include difficulties in changing traditional teaching methods, lack of support from parents, and continued emphasis only on academic outputs from schooling.

The development of measurement tools to monitor and evaluate lifeskills education in Thailand has been identified as the key to planning for the next steps in the implementation process. As decentralization of the education system continues, master trainers and supervisors will have an important role in monitoring lifeskills education in schools. The plans include training of master trainers, to enable them to develop a monitoring and supervision system to facilitate review of lifeskills education in Thailand. Lessons learned from the successes and failures should determine the way forward and will facilitate comparison of the Thai experience with that of other countries in the Region.

7. LESSONS LEARNED FROM COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

A great deal of progress has been made in recent years to incorporate lifeskills education into school systems in the South-East Asia Region. In just a few years, a number of countries have succeeded in gaining high-level government commitment to lifeskills education. In many cases, there is government, donor and NGO collaboration to support the development of lifeskills initiatives. In some cases, this has already borne results with the development and implementation of lifeskills education materials for schools and training of teachers.

In many cases, major challenges to the development of lifeskills initiatives include the lack of government policies on lifeskills education, and the lack of resources and expertise. Many lifeskills programmes in the Region remain closely linked to donor agency initiatives which could affect sustainability and continuity. Other challenges include the difficulty in changing teaching methods and generating awareness at the local level of the value of lifeskills education, particularly amongst parents. There also remains a need to address lifeskills education for out-of-school and disadvantaged adolescents.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the lessons learned, the participants made the following recommendations for the development of lifeskills education programmes at the country level:

- (1) Develop a strong (written) policy commitment to provide a sustainable national lifeskills education initiative for all children.

- (2) Promote collaboration amongst government and nongovernmental organizations to support the incorporation of lifeskills education in schools.
- (3) Provide orientation workshops on lifeskills education for middle-level personnel.
- (4) Allocate resources for the development of lifeskills education materials and dissemination.
- (5) Give a high priority to the training of teachers.
- (6) Support pilot study evaluations of lifeskills initiatives.
- (7) Create a collaborative process based on partnerships in the development of a lifeskills initiative, including community and family involvement at the local level.

The participants made the following recommendations to WHO and other UN agencies:

- (1) Provide support documents.
- (2) Provide technical support for training resource persons.
- (3) Provide consultations and access to technical expertise.
- (4) Work more closely with high-level staff of ministries of education.
- (5) Create a more unified philosophy and approach and closer collaboration among UN agencies that are working to support the advancement of lifeskills education.
- (6) Provide more focused advocacy for lifeskills education in the South-East Asia Region.
- (7) Provide follow-up orientation and planning meetings – regional seminars – to continue the work of the intercountry meeting.
- (8) Establish networking for exchanging information about lifeskills in the Region e.g. based on a web site.
- (9) Encourage sharing of expertise with study visits to successful national initiatives by programme managers of new lifeskills initiatives.
- (10) Plan for specific budgetary allocations for the development of national lifeskills initiatives.
- (11) Support pilot lifeskills projects.

Part 2

Planning Framework for Lifeskills Education Initiatives

The strategic planning framework described below covers a five-step process for working through setting up and implementing a national-level lifeskills education initiative. This process is explained in more detail in the WHO documents on lifeskills education in schools (listed at Annex 2). The five-step framework includes:

- Step 1 - Setting up a lifeskills initiative
- Step 2 - Orientation workshops: Defining concepts and action plans
- Step 3 - Developing teaching materials for lifeskills education
- Step 4 - Training of trainers and teachers
- Step 5 - Implementation and evaluation

Step 1: Setting Up a Lifeskills Education Initiative

The first step in setting up a lifeskills education initiative is to create an infrastructure capable of making the policy decisions required and of carrying those decisions through to action at the local level. Achieving this effectively and in a sustainable way requires collaboration amongst a great number of stakeholders in the education and health of young people. Two groups are typically required to provide the basic infrastructure required for a lifeskills initiative – these groups are referred to here as the Lifeskills Development Group and the Lifeskills Advisory Panel.

The Lifeskills Development Group

This group is responsible for the development of lifeskills initiatives, development and implementation of the lifeskills materials and training. The principal tasks of this group are:

- Needs assessment
- Formulation of objectives for lifeskills education
- Formulation of strategies for lifeskills education programme development
- Strategic planning (proposals, action plans)
- Management of resources for lifeskills education
- Design of the lifeskills teaching materials
- Development of training sessions for trainers of trainers
- Pilot-testing and evaluation of a draft version of lifeskills programme
- Planning and support for dissemination, implementation and evaluation of lifeskills education.

The members of this group need to have expertise in the development and implementation of innovations in education. Its members are likely to include a select group of curriculum developers, experts in the development of lifeskills and related interventions in schools, and selected teachers.

The Lifeskills Advisory Panel

The Lifeskills Advisory Panel is a larger, more diverse group of representatives of a wide number of stakeholders in education. Its purpose is to guide the work of the Lifeskills Development Group and to generate resources and commitment for lifeskills education. Its members should be people with decision-making powers and influence within the agencies that they represent.

Its members may include representatives of:

- Education authorities
- Health authorities
- Other sector authorities relevant to or responsible for education
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
- Relevant departments of universities and colleges
- Teachers' unions
- Parents and teachers' associations

- Youth organizations
- Minority groups
- Religious institutions
- Media
- Public sector agencies, including business and industry
- International agencies
- Politicians

Needs assessment

During the initial phase of setting up of a lifeskills initiative, a rapid assessment of needs is required to obtain a picture of the needs of adolescents and what lifeskills education could contribute.

This step is essential for advocating the development of lifeskills education, which is particularly relevant for dealing with problems where behaviour is the key to health, development and education outcomes. It therefore applies to a wide range of problems, from HIV/AIDS to suicide to school drop-outs. Gathering information about the wide spectrum of problems facing young people helps to justify the need for a unified approach to dealing with those problems. Priorities need to be determined and this influences the content of lifeskills education. But it is not enough just to collect statistics. Young people often have a different perspective of priority needs and it is essential to find out what they are. Focused group discussions with select groups of young people from different backgrounds can help to generate this kind of information.

The needs assessment also indicates what resources are required to begin the process of development of lifeskills education. This will depend on the current level of teacher training, the availability of expertise and related materials.

Step 2: Orientation Workshops: Defining Concepts and Action Plans for Lifeskills Education (3-5 day Workshop)

This suggestion for the second step in lifeskills initiative has been tried and tested in a number of countries.

The objective of an orientation workshop is to explore the concept of lifeskills education and to assess its meaning within the culture. Practical demonstrations and an interactive workshop process helps participants to become familiar with lifeskills education and the methods used. This provides the basis for working on a conceptual framework for the lifeskills initiative, and the recommendations and action plans for developing lifeskills education.

Such a workshop may have 30-40 participants who are representatives of the potential partners in the national lifeskills initiative.

At this stage, two workshops are typically required, one for government agencies and one for nongovernmental agencies. NGOs have greater flexibility to create innovative programmes in the short term and often begin to work with the concepts and methods soon after the first orientation workshop. A workshop for NGOs can focus on applying lifeskills to out-of-school settings, or may work on plans for lifeskills education in and out of school.

Typical Agenda for an orientation workshop

Day 1: Getting to know each other, learning about each other's work in the domain of lifeskills education. Exploring the concept of lifeskills.

Day 2: Lifeskills education: aims and objectives, and how this can be developed – lessons learned from experience.

Day 3: Strategies for incorporating lifeskills in school education. Review of materials and exploring the content of lifeskills education.

Day 4: Developing strategies for the training of teachers and trainers. Developing strategies for advocating lifeskills education in schools.

Day 5: Preparing action plans – What are the next steps?

During the workshop, lessons learned from lifeskills initiatives in other countries should be introduced and discussed among the participants. For example, lessons learned include the need for:

- long term lifeskills programmes
- trained teachers

- generic skills learning (applied to daily living) and specific applications of skills to risk situations
- developmentally appropriate activities and developmentally appropriate contexts for skills learning
- active student involvement, including peer supported learning
- links to other subjects
- user-friendly materials
- parental involvement

Another aspect of the orientation workshop is posing questions that facilitate the process of reflecting on the meaning and value of lifeskills within a culture. This can be based on discussion and debate in small groups to seek answers to questions about lifeskills, such as those listed below.

- (1) What are the day-to-day life situations and problems confronting children and adolescents at this age group? (Choose a particular age group)
- (2) What lifeskills will be needed by this group of children and adolescents to be able to deal with the day-to-day situations/problems confronting them?
- (3) In what ways can lifeskills education help children and adolescents deal with these day-to-day situations and problems?
- (4) What are the existing programmes and projects which could be good starting points for a lifeskills education programme?
- (5) What are the constraints, opportunities and concerns of introducing lifeskills education to this group of children? To address the constraints, identify recommended actions.
- (6) What are the next steps in starting a lifeskills education programme for this age group? What do we need to do together?

If the orientation workshop involves decision-makers who represent established groups ready to develop lifeskills education within a country, the action plan developed during the workshop is likely to include a major focus on the development of materials to support the implementation of lifeskills education in schools. This is described in Step 3 as the next major step in developing a lifeskills initiative.

Step 3: Developing Teaching Materials For Lifeskills Education

Training workshops can be set up to facilitate the process of developing teaching materials for lifeskills education. Future trainers and curriculum developers can be brought together for this phase of training. The workshops have a smaller number of participants than the orientation workshops (e.g. 25 people). The objective of this phase is to create and pre-test teaching materials for teachers, and to create evaluation tools.

The future trainers of trainers are involved in the lifeskills programme development process. This is an important part of training them to become master trainers.

This is an intensive, difficult stage in developing the initiative. Experience suggests that at least three workshops need to be conducted, each of five days, with a three-month interval between workshops to allow time to begin writing and testing materials.

At this stage, it is feasible to run the workshops with a mixed group of representatives of government and nongovernmental agencies. This is the opportunity to forge a true partnership between the different sectors, to work together to create a unified approach to lifeskills education in schools.

Designing a lifeskills curriculum

- Review existing lifeskills and related materials
- Prepare a scope and sequence chart for lifeskills education
- Use the scope and sequence chart to seek support and advice from experts, the advisory panel etc.
- Begin preparing a few lessons for a target age group
- Pre-test lessons in selected schools
- Revise lessons
- Continue with preparation of lessons based on the scope and sequence chart (which is also revised based on experience gained during pre-testing of lessons).

To create a scope and sequence chart, it will be helpful to review the existing lifeskills resource materials from other countries. The aim is to generate ideas: it is not advisable just to copy and implement those materials.

Lifeskills education can be designed as a long-term approach to support young people in dealing with a wide range of situations (as identified during a needs assessment). A scope and sequence chart for lifeskills education is a chance to map out the contribution of lifeskills at different stages of development and in diverse contexts. (See the WHO draft document for an example of such a chart – *Designing Lifeskills Education for Schools: Guidelines for Curriculum Developers*). This helps to avoid the tendency to consider lifeskills as specific to one domain, and opens up exploration of the role of lifeskills that are generic and relevant at school, home, the community and at work.

Experience suggests that working on a draft for the scope and sequence of lifeskills education helps to clarify the real meaning and potential of lifeskills education, early on in a lifeskills initiative. It provides a picture of what lifeskills education contributes to address developmental challenges (e.g. during adolescence) and how lifeskills education can support children and adolescents as they deal with the pressures and stresses of growing up in fast-changing societies.

A scope and sequence chart maps out the potential of lifeskills education before the first lessons are written. This is a chance to seek the support and advice of experts and the stakeholders in education (e.g. the advisory panel) before proceeding further with the development of lessons).

The lifeskills curriculum is developed gradually as experience is gained from testing the first lessons. Hence, pre-testing of lessons begins before the whole programme is written, and the development process is done in stages. The scope and sequence are refined as experience and expertise are gained.

Each lesson is designed to achieve clearly-defined and measurable learning objectives, which contribute to the objectives of the curriculum over a period of time. The first lessons to be prepared may be for the first grade of school, thus allowing the development of a sequential programme starting from the youngest age group. However, it may be that a particular age group, say young adolescents, is identified as the priority age group, typically young adolescents.

The pre-testing of lessons aims to assess the ease of use of the lesson materials (the user-friendliness), the comprehension of the language used, cultural relevance of the content and illustrations etc. The pre-test needs to be

carried out in different types of schools in different parts of the country to give a picture of the real meaning, value and implications of the lesson material.

A scope and sequence chart can help to identify how existing, related initiatives can be incorporated into a long-term approach to lifeskills education. It is often found that initiatives in the domain of lifeskills exist, although they are not called that. Developing lifeskills education often implies reworking and reorganizing existing initiatives to create a unified, developmental approach to help young people deal with diverse problems in a positive way.

However, not all projects are appropriate for the introduction of lifeskills education. A scope and sequence chart can help to evaluate the potential to build on existing initiatives. During lifeskills learning, it is important to be able to transfer and apply skills learning to completely different domains. It can therefore be difficult to begin the development of lifeskills education on the basis of programmes that teach skills specific to only one domain. For instance, experience in the South-East Asia Region has shown the difficulties of trying to build a generic lifeskills programme on the basis of an AIDS prevention project. Although lifeskills education can contribute to HIV/AIDS education and prevention, it is important to preserve the developmental and generic approach to lifeskills learning and application. Using a scope and sequence chart, it is possible to see how a lifeskills contribution to HIV/AIDS education/prevention can be incorporated and how it reinforces and is reinforced by other aspects of lifeskills education.

Methodology

Lifeskills education is based on a dynamic, learner-centred, participatory methodology. It is essential that this methodology forms the basis of all lifeskills lessons. However, lifeskills education is far more than a participatory approach to learning. The lessons use experiential learning techniques to create the conditions for social learning of lifeskills in diverse contexts. Students learn by trying out new skills through a process of observation, practice and reinforcement. Remember that the students must learn the new attitudes and skills and not only the knowledge. Lessons can be designed to help students work through this process in a structured way, with support from teachers and other students.

A wide selection of active, learner-centred methods can be drawn upon in lifeskills lessons, including group discussion, brainstorming, debate, drama,

role play, games, song, drawing etc. For each lesson, curriculum writers have to choose the most appropriate methods and activities to help students understand the role of a life skill in a given situation, and help students apply a life skill to deal with that situation.

For “observation” and understanding of skills, the methods used include brainstorming (where students can give many diverse examples of how a skill can be applied), drama (where the teacher and students perform a scenario to show a skill in action). There are also skills learning “tools”, which allow lifeskills such as critical thinking and decision-making to be visualized as processes (such as learning steps for decision-making). Role play is an important method for practising skills. The practice of skills also includes activities where students try out skills learning tools, or other activities which allow them to try out the skill for themselves.

Reinforcement is an essential part of lifeskills lessons. Role play scenarios which offer rewarding outcomes for the positive application of a lifeskills is one way to provide reinforcement. Other sources include the encouraging support from the teacher and other students (which is why a supportive classroom environment is vital for lifeskills education), and the enjoyment that students can experience from this approach to the teaching and learning process. Reinforcement by parents is also critical; therefore lifeskills education at school should go beyond school borders.

Step 4: Training of Trainers

The first group of trainers of trainers, i.e. the master trainers, should have been involved in the development of lifeskills materials, and thus be very familiar with the programme contents, methodology and philosophy. The selection of the master trainers is very important because this group will become the model for the teacher trainers. Master trainers are often selected from teacher trainers working at the national level, or they may be innovative teachers with experience as teacher trainers. Master trainers need to have experience in implementing lifeskills lessons in the classroom. To achieve this, they can be involved in the pre-testing of lesson materials during the materials development phase.

In addition to the training and expertise gained during the development process, master trainers need further training to prepare them for the role of training other trainers. This may be based on an additional 2-3 week training

programme, during which the master trainers need to work out a suitable training programme for trainers and for teacher training.

Step 5: Implementation and Evaluation of Lifeskills Education

The implementation phase can begin with a 3-5 day workshop to facilitate planning for the pilot test implementation of lifeskills education. This workshop is an opportunity to explore, together with key partners, decisions about the choice of schools, dissemination of teacher training, and the nature of monitoring and evaluation.

One of the first steps in the implementation phase is the collection of baseline data from the schools selected for the pilot study. To assist comparison across schools, baseline information should include information about the type of school (e.g. rural/urban), socioeconomic conditions, number and age of students, etc. For study of outcomes, baseline information also includes questionnaires completed by students, and questionnaires and/or interviews for teachers and parents. The same questionnaires are administered following the pilot test implementation period.

Next follows the dissemination of the materials, training of teachers, and advocacy for the programme at the local level. In some cases, curriculum materials have been distributed during teacher training workshops to ensure that only trained teachers use the materials. The training of teachers is often short (e.g. a 2-3 day workshop) although, in some cases, a substantially longer training programme has been provided for teachers. In all cases, this initial training needs to be followed up over time. In addition, a support structure needs to be put in place for teachers. This may involve appointing trained teachers or trainers as lifeskills coordinators for each district.

Lifeskills education needs to be introduced to parents and community members to raise support for the programme and to help promote a supportive environment to reinforce young people's learning and practice of lifeskills. For instance, workshops for parents can help to set up the lifeskills programme as a partnership between the school and home.

Evaluation instruments

No international standards exist for evaluating lifeskills programmes. Evaluation tools are usually developed to assess each programme based on questions that are closely linked to programme content.

Lifeskills programmes are typically evaluated using questionnaires to assess factors, such as self-esteem, confidence, perceptions of self-efficacy, self-reports of behaviour and behavioural intentions, perceptions of peer and family relationships, perceptions of school performance, etc. These are indicators of how the lifeskills programme has influenced students and the likely implications for behaviour. This approach is based on studies which have shown that positive self-esteem, positive perceptions of self-efficacy, positive perceptions of peer relationships etc. are associated with more sociable, health-giving behaviour. When improvements in such domains are associated with the implementation of lifeskills education, the programmes are evaluated positively as having a positive impact on students.

However, there is growing interest in direct measurement of lifeskills. Efforts to do so include the development of the Adolescent Lifeskills Measurement Instrument¹ under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand. The development of this instrument is part of a WHO/UNICEF project for developing models for lifeskills measurement. The measurement instrument is a questionnaire for completion by students. It is designed to measure lifeskills including self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, critical thinking and problem solving etc. A series of trials were carried out to determine the most valid and reliable questions. All questions are answered by selecting the answer that suits best from: Very true/true/Not true/Exactly not true. Sample questions from the draft questionnaire are given below.

- Self-awareness (16 questions) - *I know my own weak points.*
- Empathy (6 questions) - *I think everyone has importance in one way or another.*
- Effective communication (8 questions) - *I can talk and share opinions with parents and friends.*
- Critical thinking (6 questions) - *I can classify information as true or false.*
- Problem solving (8 questions) - *I have liberty to choose on how to solve problems.*

¹ Draft working paper, presented by the Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, at the WHO Meeting on Protective and Risk Factors for Adolescents from Different Countries: What Can We Measure, March 2000.

Annex 1

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Bangladesh

Mr Tushar Kanti Barua
Deputy Secretary (WHO)
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka

Bhutan

Mr Sonam Phuntsho
Programme Officer (CSHP)
IECH Division, Department of Health
Thimphu

Mr Rinzin Pam
Programme Officer (School health)
Youth Guidance and Counselling Division
Education Department
Thimphu

India

Dr Srikala Bharath
Associate Professor
National Institute of Psychiatry and
Neurosciences (NIMHANS)
Hosur Road
Bangalore – 560 029

Dr G.L. Jambhulkar.
Deputy Educational Advisor
Human Resource Development
Govt. of India, Shastri Bhavan,
New Delhi

Indonesia

Drg. (Mrs) Eka Susiratnawati
Staff School Age Health
Directorate-General of Community Health
Ministry of Health
Republic of Indonesia

Dr Widaninggar Widjajanti
National Center for Physical Quality
Development
Ministry of National Education
Republic of Indonesia

Maldives

Mr Mohamed Mahir
Deputy Director
Ministry of Health
Male

Mr Ibrahim Hassa
Teacher Educator
Institute for Teacher Education
Ameenee Magu,
Male

Myanmar

U Win Kyi
Deputy Director (Curriculum)
Department of Educational Planning
and Training
Ministry of Education

Dr Aung Tun
Deputy Project Manager
National School Health Project, Department of
Health, 36, Theinbyu Road
Ministry of Health
Yangon

Nepal

Mr Laxmi Raman Ban
Ag. Director
National Health Education Information and
Communication Centre
Department of Health Services
Teku, Ministry of Health/HMG of Nepal
Kathmandu

Mr Harka Prasad Shrestha
Deputy Director
Curriculum Development Centre
Ministry of Education & sports
HMG Nepal
Kathmandu

Sri Lanka

Dr Manil Fernando
Deputy Director General (PHS)
Department of Health Services
385, Deans Road
Colombo 10

Thailand

Dr Panpimol Lotrakul
Director
Promotion and Prevention for Mental Health
Problem Division
Ministry of Public Health
Nonthaburi 11000

Dr Nikorn Dusitsin
Centre for Study in Human Sexuality
Institute of Health Research
Chulalongkorn University
Institute Building No. 2
Bangkok 10330

UN Agencies

UNFPA

Mr Pornchai Suchitta
UNFPA Assistant Representative
Bangkok, Thailand

UNESCO

Mrs Lucille C. Gregorio
Specialist in Science and Technology /
Preventive Education
920 Sukhumvit Road
Bangkok 10110, Thailand

UNICEF

Ms.Pam Baatsen
Project Officer HIV/AIDS
UNICEF East Asia & Pacific Regional Office
Bangkok, Thailand.

WHO Headquarters

Ms.Emily Samuel
Programme officer
Department of Health promotion
World Health Organization, 20, Avenue appia,
CH-1211
Geneva 27, Switzerland

SEARO

Mr Omaj M. Sutisnaputra
WHO/SEARO, Indraprastha Estate
Mahatma Gandhi Road
New Delhi, 11002, India

Dr Suniti Acharya
WHO/SEARO, Indraprastha Estate
Mahatma Gandhi Road
New Delhi, 11002, India

Observers

Mr Michael J. Rosati
Education Development Centre, Inc.,55,
Chapel Street
Newton, Massachusetts, USA 02458

Mrs Vanida Chaninyuthwong
Chief
Promotion and Prevention for Mental Health
Problem in School Section
Department of Mental Health
Nonthaburi, Thailand 11000

Facilitator

Mr. Daniel Pellaux
Chemin de Palud
1800 Vevey, Switzerland

Annex 2

ANNOTATED LIST OF WHO DOCUMENTS ON LIFESKILLS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Lifeskills Education in Schools (WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7A.Rev2)

This document provides an outline for lifeskills programme development, both conceptually and practically. Lifeskills are explained, alongside a step-by-step approach, to setting up a national lifeskills initiative. The aim of these guidelines is to stimulate lifeskills initiatives at the national level.

Training Workshops for the Development and Implementation of Lifeskills Education (WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7B.Rev.1)

This document provides a guide to running training workshops required to address the issue of lifeskills education and to begin planning and preparing for a lifeskills education initiative.

Lifeskills Education: Planning for Research (MNH/PSF/96.2.Rev.1)

This document describes research related to the development, implementation and maintenance of lifeskills education in schools. It provides a summary of the kind of research findings associated with lifeskills education, to illustrate how research supports the need for and value of lifeskills education from many different perspectives.

Designing Lifeskills Education for Schools: Guidelines for Curriculum Developers (draft)

This document is intended for people who are developing or revising lifeskills education materials for schools. The aim is to show how lifeskills programmes can be designed to address multiple social, health and education needs.

Skills for Life Newsletter

The Newsletter was produced to provide information about national and international lifeskills education initiatives. Each issue provides an update on the work of the WHO lifeskills initiative, alongside news from other UN lifeskills projects. It also includes brief summaries of selected research studies and describes plans and outcomes of national lifeskills initiatives.