

Strengthening Systems through ALiVE

Assessment of Lifeskills and Values in East Africa

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Introduction

In this brief we will outline what we have learned from the ALiVE programme about **system strengthening** in our work with government structures. This learning has been collected over the course of nearly two years of programme implementation and has been gathered and synthesised by the ALiVE team as we move forward into our next phase.

ALiVE is a 5-year collaboration between seven organisations in East Africa focusing on understanding, assessing and enhancing of life skills¹ and values. The evidence generated through the National Assessments hopes to: **i)** Generate interest of the various government education stakeholders to explore how best to enhance these competencies through enactment of policies. **ii)** Ignite a public conversation on the importance of enhancing these competences and the role of parents and communities in enhancing them.

We are now moving to the second phase of the projects where we explore the possibility of conducting classroom assessments through the various ministries of Education but also how we can use the evidence already generated to advocate for systemic change.

Goals for ALiVE



Develop **context-relevant, open-source tools** for assessing life skills and values in East Africa



Undertake a **household assessment** targeting adolescent (13-17 years) both in and out of school



Use the **evidence to draw attention** to and increase awareness



Enhance **peer learning and feedback** among the RELI member organizations

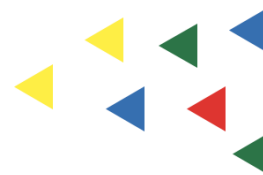
Achievements so Far

Tools developed for **Respect, problem solving, Self-Awareness** and **Collaboration**

National Household surveys carried out in **3** countries, reaching **46,000** adolescents

16 Papers published authored, **3** academic papers published, **10** blogs written, and **10** learnshops held

¹ Alternatively known as soft skills, core-competencies, non-cognitive and social emotional learning



Defining Systems Strengthening

Systems strengthening involves working closely with national education systems to enhance and sustain capacity for assessing life skills and values. While ALiVE did not deliberately set out a goal to strengthen systems around life skills and values assessment in this phase, the engagement with government at all levels made many gains in the area.

ALiVE worked closely with official government structures in the tool development process. Over the course of the programme, ALiVE engaged relevant government departments through the Technical and Advisory Committees in all three countries and involved them in developing the tools and observing the actual assessments.

Key Lessons on Systems Strengthening

1



Coalitions have more power to influence policy

Working as a coalition makes our voices louder and more impactful. Through our collaborative work, we discovered that it is easier to work with the systems as a group rather than individual organisations. This was enabled by ALiVE's genesis as a programme of the East African Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI). RELI is a coalition of over civil society actors which has been working to collaboratively to improve access to quality education in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania since 2017.

There was increased interest by government stakeholders because of our approach to work with them as part of an East African coalition. Government stakeholders paid greater attention to the ALiVE proposal for collaboration as the initiative was presented as a RELI initiative. The power of influence of over 70 organisations in East Africa made the conversation with government officials smoother. Moreover, ALiVE being an East African initiative was an added advantage as the systems saw its value beyond one country.

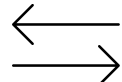
2



Continuous Engagement is Key

It is important to engage government and other organisations throughout the tool development process for their buy-in and adoption of the ALiVE programme. Our approach to working with government stakeholders was effective as we managed to keep them on board throughout the whole process and align our priorities with them. This included involving them in the launch of the programme and throughout the tool development process, piloting of the tool and actual assessment. We learned the importance of engaging them in the entire process to sustain their interest and utilisation of the outcomes of our work once the results are published.

3



Two-way learning fosters genuine engagement

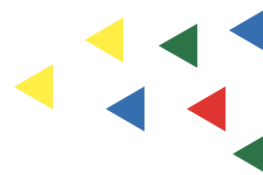
Learning alongside government structures ensures our ALiVE programme resonates with them. Treating them as learning partners in the ALiVE programme ignited their genuine interest in the process and outcomes of our work. Not only did ALiVE members learn from engaging with the government but government stakeholders increased their awareness and knowledge about assessment of life skills and values. We also learned that engaging in more informal communications with the government as well as perceiving them as co-workers to meet a shared goal could be very effective.

4



Hands-on learning increases meaningful participation

Involving government officials in workshops for the tool development and in the pilot and assessment processes ensured they had a hands-on learning experience. This hands-on involvement ensured government staff were true participants of the ALiVE process.



Targeting key government officials and involving them in the full design process from the very start made it possible for them to learn as individuals and to make connections of how the tools related to the official national curriculum, which they are overseeing.

5



Working with systems at all levels is valuable

Government structures at all levels should be valued when it comes to developing tools and assessment of life skills and values. We learned the importance of ensuring we went beyond the national level to meaningfully engage with the sub-national level regarding various assessment activities. In all three countries, implementing the assessment successfully involved working closely with relevant officials in the sampled districts and with local leaders in the target communities.

In Kenya and Uganda, the process also involved partnering with selected Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). Engaging various levels at implementation stage cultivates a strong foundation for engagement with the approach and assessment results at multiple layers. We learned that by working with local government we can have better access and reach to communities.

Where to from here?



Putting this into practice for ALiVE

How will we act on what we have learned? Through our reflection workshops we considered the following actions which we could prioritise in future programming:

- ▶ Devising means of understanding the challenges and limitations that systems encounter in assessing life skills and values.
- ▶ Ensuring we establish and agree on key actions required by government systems and put follow up systems in place.
- ▶ Ensuring that we practice what we preach. For example, how do we practice in our organisations, the values and skills that we are assessing?



What do we still need to learn?

What questions remain unanswered? ALiVE is a programme that will always continue to learn, and we hope that some of these questions can be answered not just by us but can be taken up by other researchers.

- ▶ How do we ensure we sustain engagement and relationships with official established structures?
- ▶ How can we ensure that we understand the limitations and challenges they face through continuous engagement?
- ▶ How can we strengthen our communication strategy with the government?