

# MEASURING YOUTH COMPETENCIES ACROSS CONTEXTS: LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTERS ON HOW TO ADAPT SOFT SKILLS MEASUREMENT TOOLS

YOUTHPOWER CROSS-SECTORAL SKILLS FOR  
YOUTH (CSSY) COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE  
TECHNICAL BRIEF



*Photo by Cindi Fabiola Mejia*



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

# Table of Contents



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

To gather and synthesize lessons learned from implementers' experiences adapting soft skills measurement tools in diverse geographic and cultural contexts.

- Measuring soft skills is a task that continues to challenge program implementers and M&E experts
- Growing evidence highlights the importance of these skills in contributing to youth development, but their intangible nature makes them difficult to assess
- Implementing soft skills programs across geographic and cultural contexts adds difficulty



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

Topic  
Selection

Review  
Literature

Case Study  
Interviews

CoP  
Review

Final Draft



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

**Soft skills** refer to a broad set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work collaboratively with others, perform well, and achieve their goals.

These skills are applicable across sectors and complement the acquisition of technical, vocational, and academic skills (Gates et al., 2016).



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

## Challenges in adapting soft skills measurement tools across geographic and cultural contexts

**Self-reporting bias:** most assessments rely heavily on self-report measures. Data is not reliable: youth often do not self-report negatively viewed perceptions or behaviors.

**Lack of common terminology and understanding:** most soft skills measures have been developed and tested in developed countries. These assessments are inherently biased towards western cultural terminology.

**Differences in the value of soft skills across cultures:** the importance ascribed to specific soft skills can vary and have implications for how they are assessed in different contexts.

## Education Development Center (EDC): Grounding assessment data through anchoring vignettes

- EDC and partners ensured the Anchored BFI is adaptable across contexts by consulting youth during the assessment translation process and including assessment items which limit the “fakeability” inherent in self-reporting and cultural reference bias.
- The Anchored BFI has so far been implemented alongside their youth programming in Rwanda, Honduras, and the Philippines. Going forward, EDC hopes to use the assessment as a pre-and post-evaluation tool.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING

## World Vision:

Survey development from scratch with local youth experts

- World Vision wanted to create culturally-appropriate local-language versions of the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP). This led to the development of their own *contextualization* process, which includes: qualitative research on skills concepts, translation exercises with child-experts, and staff expert translation and screening.
- Over the last seven years, World Vision has refined this contextualization process and created local language versions of the DAP in 15 countries. More recently the process was utilized to create soft skills measurement tools in Cambodia and Honduras, which will primarily be used for program evaluation.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING

## International Youth Foundation (IYF):

Testing for workforce readiness by mitigating “fakeability” and piloting across six countries

- While IYF programs have had great reach, capturing their transformative impact on youth work readiness through soft skills assessments is an ongoing challenge. In 2015, IYF decided to develop a rigorous psychometric assessment tool for measuring soft skills work readiness.
- From December 2016 to March of 2017, IYF and Pro Exam piloted the assessment with 1,640 youth in six countries: Mexico, El Salvador, Indonesia, India, South Africa, and Jordan. The pilot data is key to determining the cross-cultural applicability of the assessment, particularly across different demographics variables.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING

- 1 Having a diverse, collaborative team is crucial to adapting tools across contexts**
- 2 Involving youth early-on and throughout the adaptation process can help ensure local relevance**
- 3 The process and practicality of completing assessments is also varied across contexts**



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

- 4 **Adaptation is sometimes needed within countries to account for local and demographic nuances**
- 5 **Considering the purpose of an assessment is important when deciding on adaptation activities**



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING

# Additional References

## **References**

Care, E., Kim, H., Anderson, K., and Gustaffson-Wright, E. (2017). *Skills for a changing world: National perspectives and the global movement*, The Brookings Institution. <https://www.youtheconomicopportunities.org/resource/8531/skills-changing-world-national-perspectives-and-global-movement>

Galloway, T, Lippman, L., Burke, H., Diener, O., and Gates, S. (2017). *Measuring Soft Skills & Life Skills in International Youth Development Programs: A Review and Inventory of Tools*. Washington, DC: USAID's YouthPower Implementation IDIQ-Task Order I, YouthPower Action. <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-yp-measuring-soft-skills.pdf>

Gates, S., Lippman, L., Shadowen, N., Burke, H., Diener, O., and Malkin, M. (2016). *Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes*. Washington, DC: USAID's YouthPower: Implementation, YouthPower Action. <https://youtheconomicopportunities.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resource/resource-soft-skills-report.pdf>

Kautz, T., Heckman, J. J., Diris, R., Ter Weel, B., and Borghans, L. (2014). *Fostering and measuring skills: Improving cognitive and non-cognitive skills to promote lifetime success* (No. w20749). National Bureau of Economic Research. [http://forumfyi.org/files/soft\\_skills\\_hard\\_data\\_single.pdf](http://forumfyi.org/files/soft_skills_hard_data_single.pdf)

Olenik, C., Zdrojewski, N., Bhattacharya, S. (2013) *Scan and Review of Youth Development Measurement Tools*. USAID. Prepared by JBS International. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2155/USAID%20Life%20Skills%20Measurement%20Review%20FINAL%20EXTERNAL%20REPORT.pdf>



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTHPOWER**  
LEARNING

# Additional References

## References

Scales, P.C., Roehlkepartain, E.C., & Shramko, M. (2016). Aligning Youth Development Theory, Measurement, and Practice across Cultures and Contexts: Lessons from Use of the Developmental Assets Profile. *Child Indicators Research*. DOI 10.1007/s12187-016-9395-x. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-016-9395-x>

USAID (2016). *Measuring Youth's Soft Skills Across Cultures: Evidence from the Philippines & Rwanda*. Produced for Workforce Connections by Education Development Center (EDC), Professional Examination Services (ProExam), and Akilah Institute for Women.

<http://idd.edc.org/sites/idd.edc.org/files/Anchored%20BFI%2010%20page%20report.pdf>

Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Yohalem, N., DuBois, D. L., Peter, J., and Hillaker, B. (2014). *From soft skills to hard data: Measuring youth program outcomes*. Forum for Youth Investment. [http://forumfyi.org/files/soft\\_skills\\_hard\\_data\\_single.pdf](http://forumfyi.org/files/soft_skills_hard_data_single.pdf)



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING

# Acknowledgments

This brief was developed in consultation with members of the Cross Sectoral Skills for Youth (CSSY) Community of Practice. Case studies were developed through interviews with program implementers at EDC, IYF, and World Vision. Special thanks go to Rebecca Povec Pagel (EDC), Teresa Wallace (World Vision) and Lara Henneman, Sheerin Vesin, and Karen Phillips (IYF). For more information on YouthPower or the CSSY CoP, please visit [www.Youthpower.org](http://www.Youthpower.org) or contact Daniel Plaut ([dplaut@r4d.org](mailto:dplaut@r4d.org)), Caitlin Moss ([cmoss@r4d.org](mailto:cmoss@r4d.org)), and Shubha Jayaram ([sjayaram@r4d.org](mailto:sjayaram@r4d.org)).

Visit us at [YouthPower.org](http://YouthPower.org) to learn more, and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for updates.

For public inquiries and additional information, please email [info@youthpower.org](mailto:info@youthpower.org) or mail to:  
Making Cents International, Attention: YouthPower Learning  
1350 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 410, Washington DC 20036 USA



# Online Participation

Visit:

<https://goo.gl/forms/ZauZyazotHI853rY2>

And submit your comments!



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**PEPFAR**  
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

**YOUTH POWER**  
LEARNING