

MEASURING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

USING A DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS APPROACH IN YOUTH PROGRAMMING

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In Collaboration with Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE)

EQUIP3 (Education Quality Improvement Program) is a USAID "Leader with Associates" consortium that focuses its work on opportunities for earning and learning, especially for young people out of school and out of work. The Cross-Sectoral Youth initiative breaks new ground in engaging resources from education, health, economic growth, and democracy and governance sectors in order to learn which strategies are most likely to have positive impacts on the development of young people in partner countries.

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Setting the Scene

In January 2007, a multi-sectoral team from USAID India joined together with the USAID Washington sponsored Cross-Sectoral Youth (CSY) project to explore the expansion of a promising youth development initiative in Agra run by the well regarded Indian NGO, CURE. The goal of this collaborative venture was to assess the potential of cross-sectoral interventions, such as the one in Agra, to generate meaningful outcomes as measured by both existing sector-specific indicators, and by newer, more broadly conceived, cross-sectoral ones, such as Search Institute's *Developmental Asset Profile* (DAP). This initiative responded to an emerging interest in broad-based youth development programming among USAID Country Missions and Bureaus, along with other USG actors. It was intended to provide a hands-on learning laboratory for the practical exploration of how to move theoretical discussions about the strategic importance of holistic investments in youth into the practical realm of program design and project-level monitoring and evaluation systems. This briefing note is intended to accomplish the following:

- **Situate the work of the CSY-India project within the growing global discourse on youth programming**
- **Share the decision making process that led the CSY-India design team to the concept of *developmental assets* and the youth development frameworks and research base of the Search Institute**
- **Present Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* framework, along with the growing evidence base that correlates both protecting and promoting outcomes to young people's acquisition of developmental assets**
- **Provide a brief introduction to Search's *Developmental Asset Profile (DAP)* research and evaluation toolset**
- **Describe CSY-India's development of a customized survey tool (based on the DAP) for use in the project's monitoring and evaluation system**
- **Share initial results from the application of CSY-India's customized asset tracking tool as a measure of the cross-sectoral impact of project activities on participating youth**

Cross-Sectoral

Youth Project -The Cross-Sectoral Youth (CSY) project has been supported by USAID Missions in various countries—including India, Morocco, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. CSY aims to better meet the needs of youth in developing countries by fostering collaboration across sectors, such as health, democracy and governance, education, and economic growth. To learn more about CSY, visit csy.edc.org.

Building Upon an Emerging Global Interest in Investments in Youth

Over the past decade numerous government and non-government actors have used the well-worn refrain that “young people represent a country's future” to rally both political and financial support for investments in programs benefitting older children, adolescents and youth. Such advocacy efforts have generally focused on two broad lines of reasoning. On the one hand, the case is made for how not investing in young people poses a “threat” to a nation's future stability because of the well documented links between disconnected young people and the phenomena of extremism, delinquency and youth-related public health threats such as drug use and HIV-AIDS. On the other hand, the case is made that youth all too often represent an “untapped asset” who could contribute much more than they currently do to national growth and prosperity if their capacity for positive risk taking and innovation were more fully engaged. Both lines of reasoning rely on equally broad conceptual frameworks – including variations of the “youth bulge” theory for proponents of the threat disconnected youth represent to social and political stability; and derivatives of the “positive youth development” and “community youth development” frameworks for those who speak about the untapped potential of youth to be agents of positive change in their communities.

It is, nevertheless, interesting to note that actors who make these kinds of broad-based appeals for investments in young people, often then turn to traditional, sector-specific interventions in basic education, adolescent reproductive health, youth leadership development, or entrepreneurship training when asked how they would invest new resources made available to youth programming. This itself represents a challenging disconnect between (i) the use of broad, cross-sectoral arguments for prioritizing additional resources for youth programming and (ii) advocacy for narrow, sector-specific interventions, when it comes time to putting new resources to work. The practical obstacle faced by many funders—and the reason why narrow, sector-specific programs are often proposed as the best way to proceed—is that very little is thought to be known about either what broad-based youth development looks like in an applied setting or how key indicators of holistic youth development might be tracked and measured within conventional project-level monitoring and evaluation systems.

From Theoretical Frameworks to Real World Interventions

The CSY-India design team was thus exploring largely uncharted terrain for USAID-supported programs when they took on the challenge of developing a project level

CSY-India – CSY India was built upon an existing community development initiative—the Cross-cutting Agra Program (CAP)—which worked with young people in five low income settlements in the Trans-Yamuna section of Agra. The program had been implemented in Agra by the CURE with financial assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and in partnership with the Agra Municipal Corporation and various local agencies, private sector and Agra civil society.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system (and related tools) that could track both the sector-specific and the cross-sectoral outcomes they intended the project to achieve. Moreover, the project's interest in both promoting outcomes (such as increased livelihood development, enhanced community engage-

ment, and improved civil society participation) and *protective outcomes* (such as improved reproductive health and

decreased risk of HIV AIDS and drug use) required that the CSY-India design team look to existing evidence bases that linked holistic outcomes to concrete *promoting and protecting* behaviors. CURE and its CSY-India partners saw promise in the concept of *developmental assets* as a way of describing the holistic building blocks young people need to acquire to be successful, and they turned to pioneering work done by the Minneapolis-based social science research organization Search Institute (see www.search-institute.org) for evidence of the links between developmental assets and key behavioral outcomes.

Drawing on Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets Model

One particular overarching youth development model and related evidence base that caught the interest of the CSY-India design team was Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* framework. In the mid-1980s, when Search Institute was challenged to come up with a practical way of categorizing, researching, and measuring change over time in the kinds of *competencies* (or assets) that young people draw on to build successful adult lives, they started with the existing research base on the concepts of resiliency, thriving, and positive youth development. After an extensive review of this research base¹, Search Institute delineated an overall framework of *40 Developmental Assets*, which were clustered into eight *Asset Categories*, and then further grouped under the headings of *Internal and External Assets* (see Table 1 on next page).

¹For more on Search Institute's comprehensive review of the available literature, see the publication *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (2004), which conveniently presents the synthesis of research under each of the eight Asset Categories in Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* framework.

Table 1: Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets Framework

External Assets		Internal Assets	
Asset Category	Assets	Asset Category	Assets
Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Support 2. Positive Family Communication 3. Other Adult Relationships 4. Caring Neighborhood 5. Caring School Climate 6. Positive Involvement in Schooling 	Commitment to Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Achievement Motivation 22. School Engagement 23. Homework 24. Bonding to School 25. Reading for Pleasure
Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community Values Youth 8. Youth as Resources 9. Service to Others 10. Safety 	Positive Values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Caring 27. Equality and Social Justice 28. Integrity 29. Honesty 30. Responsibility 31. Restraint
Boundaries & Expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Family Boundaries 12. School Boundaries 13. Neighborhood Boundaries 14. Adult Role Models 15. Positive Peer Influence 16. High Expectations 	Social Competencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. Planning and Decision Making 33. Interpersonal Competence 34. Cultural Competence 35. Resistance Skills 36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution
Constructive Use of Time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Creative Activities 18. Youth Programs 19. Religious Community 20. Time at Home 	Positive Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 37. Personal Power 38. Self-Esteem 39. Sense of Purpose 40. Positive View of Personal Future

Measuring the Presence of Developmental Assets

Since its articulation of the *40 Developmental Assets* framework in 1989, Search Institute has worked with government and non-government partners both in the United States and internationally to pilot ways of “measuring” the presence of these 40 Assets among young people from a wide range of backgrounds. Using anonymous surveys with over 2 million young people from urban, suburban, and rural communities, Search Institute has been able to build a tremendous database on the percentages of young people who report experiencing each asset. Moreover, by disaggregating findings by age, gender, ethnic heritage, economic situation, and geographic location, Search Institute has been able to compare and contrast assets among an extremely diverse range of young people. Search’s *40 Developmental Assets* framework and

survey tools have also been used by researchers looking at particular clusters of young people—including those involved in gangs, youth in urban school districts, and youth affiliated with religious congregations. In addition, Search Institute has partnered with numerous large domestic and international youth-serving organizations to help these groups better understand and address the assets, needs, and developmental trajectories of the young people they serve. While international applications of Search Institute’s *40 Developmental Assets* framework is a relatively recent phenomenon, local organizations and international development groups have piloted the use of the *40 Developmental Assets* framework in countries as diverse as Bolivia, the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, Egypt, Tajikistan, Morocco, Yemen, the Dominican Republic, and India (to name a few).

The CSY-India design team saw enormous promise in the *40 Developmental Assets* framework’s overall ability to describe

many of the significant outcomes seen (but not measured) in previous rounds of holistic youth programming in Agra. The team was also intrigued by the work that Search Institute had done to develop an evidence base linking the acquisition of developmental assets with some of the key behavioral outcomes typically of interest to sector-specific funders active in the same communities and projects.

Linking Developmental Assets with Protecting and Promoting Outcomes

Since most government and non-government actors still fund youth programming on the basis of sector-specific needs and priority outcomes, Search Institute has long understood the importance of linking its research into young people's acquisition of developmental assets with what it refers to as key promoting and protecting behaviors. A good deal of Search Institute's research with the 40 Developmental Assets framework has thus focused on simultaneously gathering data for government and non-government actors about young people's self-reports on the presence of assets, along with their self-reports on behaviors of interest. The protecting behaviors tracked by Search have included those related to (i) alcohol use, (ii) tobacco use, (iii) illicit drug use, (iv) anti-social behavior, (v) violence, (vi) school failure, (vii) sexual activity, (viii) attempted suicide, and (ix) gambling. On the other hand, the promoting behaviors researched have included (i) academic achievement, (ii) school completion, (iii) leadership, (iv) pro-social behavior, (v) delayed gratification, and, (vi) affirmation of diversity. Search Institute's extensive research base has pinpointed the specific assets most strongly correlated with particular protective or promoting behaviors. It has also shown the more comprehensive correlation between the cumulative number of assets developed and the frequency or intensity of key protecting and promoting behaviors. Regression analysis has shown a strong predictive relationship between assets and behaviors—a relationship many times stronger than that explained by differences in age, gender, ethnic heritage, economic situation, or geography². Such an evidence base—though not specific to the Indian context—was of immense interest to the CSY-India

design team, who were then intrigued by the ways that the 40 Developmental Assets framework and Search Institute's growing research base on the correlation between assets and behaviors could be linked in concrete and practical ways with the CSY-India's project-level monitoring and evaluation system.

²For more on the links between assets and behaviors see the Search Institute publication *The Asset Approach* (2002).

Search Institute's Developmental Assets Profile (DAP)

As the CSY-India team soon discovered, the *Developmental Asset Profile* (DAP) is a 58-item survey instrument that was created by Search Institute to measure the presence—and change over time—of the eight categories of developmental assets found within Search's *40 Developmental Assets* framework³ (see Table 1 above). The DAP is an individual measure that yields quantitative scores for each of these eight asset categories (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity) along with five broad context areas (personal, social, school, community, and family). The DAP is typically completed either via self-administration (where the learner reads and scores each item on their own) or via oral administration (where a teacher/youth worker reads each item and the learner scores each item on their own). The DAP is designed to be sensitive to changes in reported assets over time, and it is suited to both research and program evaluation. Change over time is tracked through the administration of the DAP on at least two separate occasions (*Time One and Time Two*)—using the same survey instrument with the same learners⁴. Advantages of the DAP for project-level M&E systems are in its length—the 58 items can typically be answered in 15–25 minutes. The fact that the DAP can be administered to groups of 20–25 learners either orally or via self-administration also makes it relatively cost-efficient to apply, and the use of the data generated for profiling learners, tracking change over time, and supporting project-level guidance counseling efforts makes it cost-effective in the multiplicity of its M&E applications.

Important Reminder –

To ensure the highest quality of DAP usage, Search Institute requires all prospective partner groups to request permission for both translating and using the DAP. If your organization is interested in using the DAP in its entirety, then please contact Search Institute at debg@search-institute.org.

³This distinguishes the DAP from the A&B survey, which does produce a score for all 40 individual developmental assets.

⁴See the Search Institute publication *The DAP Users Manual* (2005) for additional information.

for determining the nature of interventions in the second phase of the project.

Sample – The sample size and composition varied across the three sets of data and are summarized in Table 2 (see below). The reason for variation can be attributed to the project's approach, timeline, and nature of its interventions. As the sample size remained large over the study period, the results can nevertheless be said to be representative.

CSY-India's Customized Developmental Assets Tracking Tool

The DAP's demonstrated success in various geo-socio-cultural contexts and its proven effectiveness in social development programming influenced the decision of CSY-India's design team to develop its own customized developmental assets tracking tool to quantify youth assets in low-income settlements of Agra. This modified tool was used by CSY-India to assess change in individual participant's overall asset profile as an outcome of the project's development intervention. CSY-India's customized tool drew on a number of the individual survey items and sub-scales found in the DAP and was similarly influenced by Search Institute's overall *40 Developmental Assets* framework.

Methodology – The asset impact study was designed as a pre- and post-intervention comparative research of youth assets. Three sets of data populated the study:

1. Baseline data, collected at the start of the project – May 2007
2. Midline data, collected half way through the project – November 2007
3. End-line (or final) data, collected at the conclusion of project activities – May 2008

Time-series data were developed with the objective of observing trends. Midline data were gathered but not formally analyzed. However, midline data were used

Table 2: CSY-India Sample

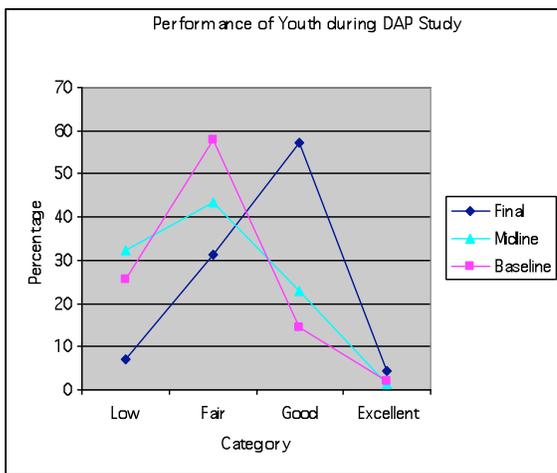
Sex	Age Group								
	12-18			19-24 years			Total		
	Base-line	Mid-line	Final	Base-line	Mid-line	Final	Base-line	Mid-line	Final
Boys	40	50	51	25	16	40	65	66	91
Girls	121	132	127	13	24	23	134	156	150
Total	161	182	178	38	40	63	199	222	241

Survey Tool – CSY-India's customized developmental assets tracking tool was used to profile assets among young people in the CSY project. This tool consisted of 32 individual items rated by a team of experts. The tool was translated into Hindi so that it could be used by the local field teams. CSY-India drew upon the eight asset categories found in Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* framework in the construction of the customized tool's scoring matrix. The survey instrument was pretested with 20 respondents before it was finalized. Based on the field test, some questions were restructured and additional instructions were added to the administration guidelines. Instructions developed for reading aloud to participants were also carefully reviewed with facilitators to ensure standardization in their use.

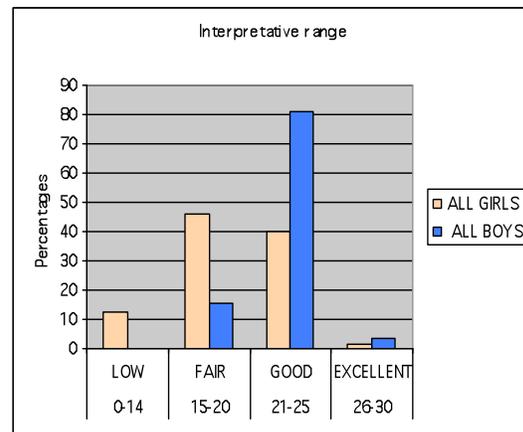
Scoring – CSY-India drew upon Search Institute's DAP User's Manual in the design of its scoring matrix—and also employed the standardized scoring procedures and methodology described in the DAP User's Manual. Responses were entered into a computer database using Microsoft's® Excel® software program and then analyzed.

CSY-India's Preliminary Results

Overall results indicated that there was a significant increase in developmental assets among youth participating in the project. Baseline data showed a high percentage of youth to be in the “fair” category of total assets (58 percent) at the start of the project; whereas, the end-line assessment shows a significant shift to the “good” category (57 percent of participants). The percentage in the “excellent” category doubled from the baseline figure of 2 percent—even though it had shown a decline to 1 percent in the midline stage—to 4 percent in the final assessment. Since very few young people fell into the “excellent” category overall, the drop in percentage in the midline set of data may well be attributable to a sampling error.



that of boys, girls did show a decline in numbers in the “fair” category—46 percent from a baseline of 54 percent—suggesting that many had improved their total asset score. The gender gap in developmental assets might be ascribed to the more restrictive environments for girls’ participation in community activities, along with a shift in the nature of project activities implemented—from small group and female-centric activities, such as henna application, sewing, and beauty culture, to sports and event management, which were more male-centric. Within the gendered socio-cultural context of Agra, an over four-fold increase in assets of girls can be considered a significant project achievement. Gender asset gap and project activity matching suggests that not all activities and contexts are gender neutral. Small group activities may be more female friendly, especially in restrictive social environments, enabling girls to more gradually and gently explore new contexts and vistas. Also small group events for girls are within the comfort zone of parents in traditional milieus, as was evident with the project’s theater group.



Gender Asset Gap – Among boys, achievements were markedly higher as compared to girls, with the majority (81 percent) of boys reporting “good” assets at the end-line as compared with 55 percent of girls. None of the boys scored in the “low” asset category at end-line; a significant change from baseline results. Nearly an equal number of girls scored in the fair and good categories (46 percent in fair and 40 percent in good) at the end-line. Achievements among boys are noteworthy; from just 12 percent scoring in the “good” category at the start to 81 percent in the “good” category at the end-line: a near seven-fold increase. Among girls, nearly 55 percent were in the “good” category at end-line as compared to a baseline figure of 16 percent: almost a four-fold growth. Although overall achievement for girls was lower than

CSY-India's Emerging Lessons Learned

CSY-India's pilot use of a customized asset tracking tool inspired by Search Institute's DAP is seen by all stakeholders to have been an enormous success. The customized asset tracking tool provided an integrated, cross-sectoral component to the project's M&E system, which had previously not been well-developed. This tool seemed to effectively capture the broad gains in assets previously only described in anecdotal reports—and its use also surfaced some gender disparities in project design and roll-out that might otherwise not have been so directly measurable or so readily understood.

While further work still needs to be done developing an India-specific evidence base and linking the acquisition of cross-sectoral developmental assets with changes in sector-specific behaviors (of interest to USAID and local funders alike), other groups in India and elsewhere may well want to follow CURE's

lead in using assets as a useful proxy for the holistic positive youth development outcomes long spoken about, but seldom tracked or measured, by the local youth-serving sector.

USAID Missions and their local partners in other world regions should similarly be encouraged to explore the application of Search Institute's conceptual frameworks, evidence base, and research and evaluation tools in the design of future cross-sectoral and sector-specific youth development projects. Such an approach may well help local partnerships both better capture evidence of effective results and, at the same time, track indicators of either key gaps in programming or inherent areas of bias in overall project design.

Additional Resources— Readers interested in using the DAP in project level M&E applications might be interested in three handbooks developed by the USAID-supported EQuALLS project in the Philippines:

- The DAP Coordinators Handbook
- The DAP Administrators Handbook
- The DAP Data Management Handbook

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