

sphere

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This edition of Sphere discusses the development, adaptation, and testing of *Doorways*, the Life Skills curriculum developed by the Safe Schools Program aimed at reducing gender-based violence in schools. The *Doorways* modules serve to remind students, parents and teachers—and their broader communities throughout Ghana and Malawi—that a safe school environment is a right, not a privilege.

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The Safe Schools Program (SSP) is a five-year program of DevTech Systems, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Women in Development, to create safe school environments for all girls and boys, promote gender equitable relationships, and reduce gender-based violence. The program, which is being implemented in Ghana and Malawi, focuses on gender-based violence in schools, presenting issues that cut across education, gender, and health. The SSP works with individuals, groups, and institutions at both the local and national levels, by seeking to engage students, school staff, parents, community leaders, and policy makers in understanding and institutionalizing children's rights to safe schools. The expected results of the program are an improvement in education outcomes and a reduction in negative health incidents for the children.



Malawian school children attending weekly assembly.

The SSP, which is built around an evidence-based approach to program design and activities, began with a series of studies in four countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Jamaica, and Malawi) in preparation for development of the program work plan. All four country assessments found that: 1) gender-based violence is widespread throughout the school systems; 2) both girls and boys are victims as well as perpetrators of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV); and 3) the common forms of SRGBV include sexual violence, physical violence and psychological violence.

Based on the evidence collected during the assessments, the SSP designed six main activities to address SRGBV in Ghana and Malawi, which are being implemented with community partners in these countries. The activities are:

- Life skills training for students;
- Counseling and referral services for students;
- SRGBV prevention training for teachers;
- Development of community action plans to counter SRGBV;
- Development of a Teachers' Code of Conduct for SRGBV; and
- A national advocacy initiative to promote SRGBV legislation, policy, and enforcement.

Life Skills for Students

Activities aimed at enhancing the resilience and self-efficacy of students by building their SRGBV life skills began with a series of workshops and pilot training sessions in Ghana and Malawi in July 2006. The purpose of these initial activities was to adapt the SRGBV Life Skills Manual, *Doorways*, developed by DevTech Systems, Inc. to the specific cultural setting in each country.

Key issues

Doorways is designed for young people ages 10 to 14. Young people will receive 40 hours of in-class life skills instruction throughout school year. The introductory module provides students and facilitators a structured way in which to get to know each other and the Safe Schools Program goals. It further encourages students to look within themselves and identify their own talents, strengths and skills.

This is followed by the Goal Setting module in which students develop one personal goal for the future. It includes a healthy goal-setting guide to establish a realistic and obtainable personal goal. Students are also encouraged to learn about and contribute to the goals set by their peers. This personal goal for the future is then used throughout the entire training, as students are asked to reflect on their personal goal when other topics are introduced. For example, students may be asked, "How does inequality between boys and girls affect your goal for the future?" With a carefully planned personal goal, students are more likely to make healthy personal choices.

The Young People's Rights module defines and explores human rights on a basic and realistic level. Young people are often not aware of their own very basic human rights, but rather think of rights as something they will obtain as they get older. Girls (and women) often resolve that human rights are something they will never obtain or are not worthy of enjoying. Students are asked to begin by respecting the rights of each other. Students are later asked to link rights to their personal goal, gender roles, age (discrimination against young people based on their age) and violence, because these four areas are often intertwined.

In the Gender module, both boys and girls explore gender roles placed on them by their peers, themselves, their families, and society. Students use critical thinking and decision-making skills to chart their way through role-plays and scenarios that evaluate the impact of gender roles on gender inequality and violence. Students begin to examine the relationship between gender roles and one's susceptibility to being the victim or perpetrator of violence. Gender is a cross-cutting theme in the manual, and many of the learning objectives from this module are woven throughout the entire curriculum.

School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Our Community is a module in which students define SRGBV and, through critical thinking activities, learn to assess when a situation becomes unbearable or unacceptable, how to escape a potential SRGBV incident, and appropriate behavior when an incident has occurred. After reading a story about two young people who experienced an SRGBV incident, students explore why these two people should or should not report the incident, and develop



Using isolated bathrooms is viewed as unsafe by both boys and girls.

specific rules on how to help someone who has had an experience like these two students in the story. They also role-play how to escape a potential SRGBV incident. Students hear from people in the community who want to help them deal with SRGBV within the school and in their community. Using a card game, students practice and strategize how to report an SRGBV incident and how to cope if the person they contact does not believe them or otherwise brushes them off.

The Healthy Relationships module focuses on the qualities of friendship, and how to establish limits and boundaries in these relationships. Students identify the range of feelings experienced by young people, and, in small groups, explore ways to express and manage these emotions. Role-playing is used to practice negotiation skills and to resist negative influences from friends and peers. Students explore the pros and cons of friendships with members of the opposite sex through a brainstorming activity and small group discussion. Through skits, students portray effective and ineffective mentors, and then review effective mentoring characteristics.

Adaptation and Pilot Testing

The *Doorways* manual, prepared in the United States, provides a generic framework for the training, which must be adapted to the cultural setting in each country, with appropriate names, scenarios, language, and objectives, before it can be used in the classroom. A five-day workshop in each country, with representatives from the Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth, national NGO, the USAID Mission, and school students was the basis for this initial adaptation. The purpose of the workshop was to give participants the opportunity to review the *Doorways* manual and provide feedback for its adaptation. The main objectives of the workshop were to:

- Establish a common understanding of the status of young people in the country;
- Establish a shared understanding of what SRGBV is and how it manifests itself in the national context;
- Review the *Doorways* manual and assess the extent to which it meets the intended goals and objectives of the life skills program;
- Assess the cultural acceptability and age appropriateness of the manual; and,
- Provide input to make the manual culturally acceptable and age appropriate.

The workshop used participatory methods to involve attendees in the discussion and to reach a common understanding of the issues and the proposed approach. The participants worked in small groups to review the manual, and based on the guidelines they were given, proposed adaptations and changes.

Pilot testing of the adapted *Doorways* life skills manual was the second stage in the process. A six-day training of trainers'

workshop was organized by the NGO program grantee in each country to prepare the participants for the testing process. In addition, a one-day preparatory meeting was held with the Safe Schools Program facilitators to discuss the workshop agenda, sessions to be facilitated, roles and expectations, and the acquisition and preparation of other materials to used in the workshop.

Ghana Students at a Life Skills Session

In both Malawi and Ghana, the SSP Country Coordinator presented an overview of the SSP as a whole, and of the SSP activities in that country. This session was followed by a discussion of the manifestations and types of SRGBV, with specific examples from the SSP communities. Other activities and topics for the first day included guided imagery, an exploration of the status of young people, and an introduction to the *Doorways* manual and the cross-cutting themes in the manual. The second day began with a discussion of facilitation skills and experiential learning followed by an activity for participants to clarify their values regarding young people and SRGBV. The rest of the day focused on the process for the remainder of the workshop, and a thorough discussion of the main issues addressed in the manual. The discussions were followed by the facilitation of two sessions on specific modules from the manual.

Participants were assigned the remaining modules in the manual to prepare and facilitate, using the workshop participants as students. Thus, each of the participants had the opportunity to facilitate a session from the manual, and at its conclusion, to receive feedback from the participants and workshop conveners. The workshop concluded with a discussion on how, when, and where the pilot testing would be done. By the end of the workshop, participants:

- Understood and could explain the issues in the *Doorways* life skills manual;
- Clarified their values and feelings regarding youth; and
- Demonstrated knowledge and skills in participatory methodologies and skills to effectively facilitate sessions of the manual.

The pilot testing of *Doorways* life skills manual took one month to complete in each country. Six schools with characteristics similar to those of the SSP intervention schools were selected. The facilitators and the teachers worked in teams. Each *Doorways* session was tested at least three times in a classroom setting to provide the feedback needed to finalize the manual adaptation.

The teachers and the facilitators were encouraged to prepare adequately before each session by:

- Assembling all teaching aids to be used before starting a session;
- Becoming familiar with the session and activity steps;
- Adhering to the steps in the session; and,
- Ensuring a co-facilitator would be present at each session.

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Soon after completing each session, the teachers and facilitators were to complete the Pilot Test Feedback Guide.

Next Steps

Reports from the pilot testing indicated that the *Doorways* life skills program was well received by both students and teachers, including classroom teachers who did not participate as facilitators. The experiential method that was used made the sessions lively, and students who participated in the sessions said they found the topics to be relevant and practical, and they felt their confidence had improved over the course of the pilot. They also expressed support for including topics such as “My body is changing” and “HIV/AIDS.”

The adapted *Doorways* manuals will be used in the training of teachers from the twenty SSP intervention schools in each country. The trainings events are scheduled for January 2007. The trained teachers will then return to their schools and work with students to build their life skills.

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Established in 1984 by economist Jorge A. Sanguinety, Ph.D., DevTech Systems, Inc. is a consulting firm that offers technical assistance in the following practice areas:

- Economic and Social Development
- Education and Human Capacity Development
- Environment and Natural Resource Management
- Gender Integration (Women in Development)
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- Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

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