

Skills for Kids

A Youth Initiative that Develops an Early Entrepreneurial Mindset in Children

Supported by the Tokyo Foundation's Joint Initiative Program (JIP)

On a beautiful summer day, at a summer camp 40 km outside of Ulaanbaatar, twenty young children worked excitedly in groups, formulating creative ideas and strategies for potential businesses. Though it was the middle of the holidays, they all had smiles on their faces and were thoroughly enjoying their learning experience. This was just one of the many learning-by-doing lessons that marked the first "Skills For Kids" workshop held on Saturday, August 9 in Mongolia.

"Skills For Kids" was conceptualized by four young professionals - Prathima Rodrigues, Badamjav Batsukh, Sunil Mathew and Sapruddin Perwira – located in three different countries. Their primary objective was to introduce children in developing countries to important life and entrepreneurial skills. "Activities that focus on life skills and financial skills, enable children to be more productive in the classroom, more self-sufficient and more inclined to contribute to their community's social and economic development," says Prathima. "Significant anecdotal and empirical evidence show that if encouraged at an early age, a targeted curriculum, pedagogy and faculty can catalyze the development of an entrepreneurial mindset among young adults."

The Skills for Kids workshops introduce concepts that range from life skills such as healthy eating and communication to entrepreneurial skills such as opportunity recognition, supply and demand, production, sales and marketing. These skills are intuitively used by most adults. However, many a time, even adults are not able to apply these skills in the most effective way. Formally exposing children to these skills at a young age will positively influence their future learning and life-experiences. The team stresses that the curriculum is not meant to replace current education, but rather to supplement and enhance it.

"Many donors and academics come to the camp to visit the children and on supervision missions. But this is the first time that students are learning a set of extremely useful skills," says Ms. B. Danya, a senior teacher at the summer camp in Mongolia, who has worked with the institution for close to 30 years. "Our teachers should be trained on how to conduct this workshop so that many more children can benefit from this program."

The children were encouraged to express their views on the workshop and provide feedback on what they liked or disliked. Fifteen-year-old Tuya said, "The activities were interesting. I learnt a lot about business skills and I had a lot of fun." At the Ulaanbaatar workshop, the children found the module on "Production and Sale" to be the most engaging. This activity had children working in groups of five and running their own hat-production firms. Children were able to understand the concept of an assembly line, division of labor, specialization, marketing, customer requirement, and profit and loss. The module enabled an experiential learning framework that encouraged them to experience, reflect and apply knowledge learned. "We were genuinely surprised but very

pleased with the ingenuity of the students,” says Prathima. “They were able to understand and apply many of these complex concepts in a simple way.”

"The unique aspect of the Skills for Kids model is that it is based on two parallel streams of learning – building tangible skills in economics or finance and developing behavioral traits such as decision-making, positive self-esteem and good communication,” says Badamjav. “Each activity follows this bi-channel approach and ensures that students grasp the core theme of each lesson and at the same time develop these traits. The workshop also hones traditional skills in mathematics, reading and writing.”

“Such workshops are especially relevant in economies, such as that of Mongolia,” says Judag Bayarma, the lead facilitator for the workshop in Mongolia. “A large percentage of the population here earns its livelihood running small and medium scale businesses.”

In Mongolia, the team was advised by a group of local and international education experts who provided feedback on the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum to the target population. The conclusions of the stimulating discussions were promptly incorporated into the curriculum. The “Skills For Kids” team plans to further refine the curriculum by conducting workshops in India later this year and, in the long-term, plans to disseminate the curriculum, best practices and lessons learned from the implementations.

These four young people represent a new breed of young change-makers – individuals who, rather than only talk of what’s wrong, get together and try to make change happen. "We are extremely proud of what we have achieved," says Sunil. "There is much that young people can do with a little creativity and a lot of hard work. The world seems to be losing sight of the fact that a critical part of the long-term solution to current global problems is equipping today’s youth with the skills to handle these same issues tomorrow."

The Skills for Kids Team: Prathima Rodrigues (Technology Policy Analyst, The World Bank), Badamjav Batsukh (Officer, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Mongolia), Sunil Mathew (Senior Software Engineer, OPNET Technologies) and Sapruddin Perwira (Deputy Project Director, Project Hope, Indonesia). The team was advised by an expert panel consisting of education experts from Mongolia. For more information on “Skills For Kids”, contact skillsforkids@yahoo.com or visit <http://www.entrepreneurshipforkids.com>

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Joint Initiatives Program: Skills for Kids



Students at the Mongolia workshop learning about healthy eating



Skills for Kids Advisory Board: Standing (from left to right): Judag Bayarma, Ulziihand.T, Narangerel. Ts, Enkhtuya.S, Hishigbayar, Bolormaa.S. Sitting (from left to right): Prathima Rodrigues, Badamjav Batsukh, Sunil Mathew, Narmandakh.P. Byambatsogt Jugder (not in picture)



Students at the Mongolia workshop presenting a poster advertising their restaurant business