



Komo Learning Centres: Do It Yourself Clubs



Komo Learning Centres Background

Komo Learning Centres (Komo) began operations in 2009, supporting the Johnson Nkosi Primary School in Mukono district. Since this initial program, Komo has expanded to include a health centre III, an extensive community health worker program, a youth centre that facilitates various workshops and trainings (e.g., sustainable farming and SRH), a sponsorship program that supports over 90 young people, and the LEAP entrepreneurship initiative which has trained over 4,000 out-of-school youth. With our newest initiative, the Do It Yourself (DIY) Clubs, we are working to create a paradigm shift in Ugandan secondary schools toward more meaningful student engagement and youth decision-making.

Challenges

Uganda is the fifth youngest country in the world (United Nations, 2019). It is these young people to whom we must look for innovation and leadership – not tomorrow, but today. Unfortunately, most young people in Uganda (and around the world) are not adequately prepared by the formal schooling system to think critically, communicate effectively, or set (and achieve) personal goals, thus undermining their agency and successful transitions to adulthood. A World Bank/Association for the Development of Education in Africa report from 2008 succinctly describes the challenges young people face in Uganda’s formal scholastic environment: “The prevailing pedagogy is didactic and teacher-centred – primarily focusing on teaching to tests and rote memorization. The existing curriculum (in common with that of many countries that are either developing or in transition) is a static one in which learners, driven by the need to succeed in a high-stakes examination, are forced to learn a mass of knowledge that is largely abstract, fact-centred, decontextualized and irrelevant.” Additionally, the same report points out the rigid teacher-student relationship and its detrimental effects on students’ acquisition of core competencies, such as problem-solving, applying knowledge in novel situations, and working constructively in teams. Thus, it is no wonder that in addition to financial constraints, a 2014 UNICEF report listed “disinterest” and “poor classroom environment” as significant factors in school dropout.

In response to these historical challenges, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports through the National Curriculum Development Centre has developed an exciting and innovative new curriculum for lower secondary schools. This new curriculum is more holistic, flexible, inclusive, and life-skills oriented. We applaud the new curriculum and the educational shifts it promises.

We see our DIY Clubs as a natural extracurricular complement to this new curricular addition from Uganda’s education pioneers. We started the DIY program to address the following gaps identified in the education literature and experienced by our community partners: inadequate lifeskills preparation, lack of student agency, teacher-centered pedagogy, and rigid teacher-student relationships.

- **Inadequate lifeskills preparation** (e.g., communication; critical thinking; etc.): In DIY, students learn lifeskills through both direct trainings and from “experiential learning,” i.e., opportunities to work with others to achieve a common goal through student-led projects.
- **Lack of agency:** Young people are the DIY Club decision-makers and drive all programming. This strengthens their leadership capacity, increases ownership, and shows them that they are valuable change agents in their schools.
- **Teacher-centered pedagogy:** Through the teacher training packages that accompany the DIY clubs, teachers learn the benefits and techniques to create a more student-centered, learning-positive environment through direct trainings and first hand experiences with the innovative and exciting pedagogy used to facilitate DIY activities.

- **Rigid teacher-student relationships:** Throughout all DIY activities, we explore the benefits of a youth-adult partnership model as well as critically reflect on the harmful consequences of adults using “power over” youth. In addition, through successful student-led projects, teachers and administrators begin to shift their ideas about the potential value and capacity of students in the school.

Through our DIY program we are beginning to transform youth experiences by challenging the traditional adult-youth power dynamics and providing young people spaces to explore their own lives and learn the necessary skills to take control over their own destinies. We have seen extraordinary progress across club members: they have become better communicators, developed a greater sense of hopefulness and optimism about the future, and are beginning to catalyze change in their school environments. For girls in particular, DIY participants have shared how their engagement in the club bolsters self-esteem and gives them confidence to speak out about gender issues.

DIY Overview

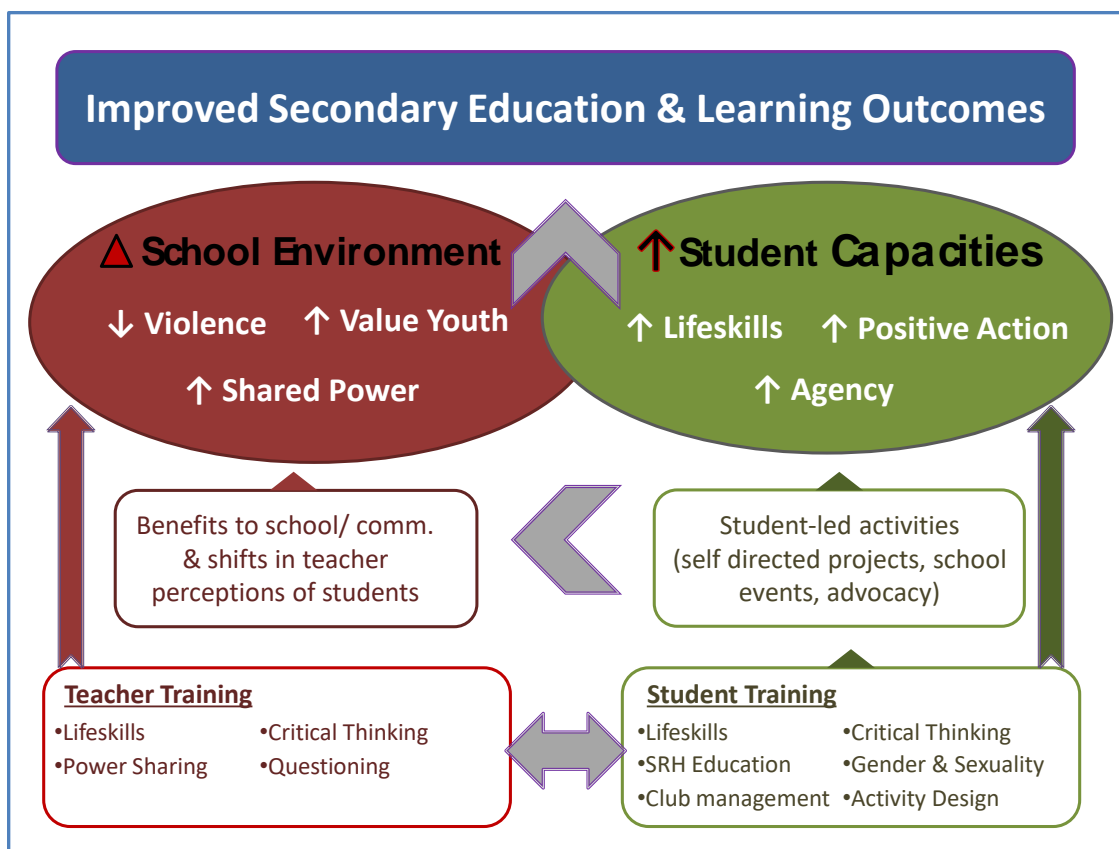
We designed the Do It Yourself (DIY) Clubs with the goal of shifting power dynamics and improving learning outcomes in Ugandan secondary schools. The DIY program is rooted in a Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach, specifically the framework created by the USAID YouthPower Learning Project in 2016. It puts forth four domains—assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment—that contribute to more active, engaged, and thriving young people. The crux of DIY is the “contribution” domain, or as we at Komo describe it: “meaningful youth engagement.” In our experience, providing opportunities for youth to show what they can do is transformational—changing the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and other students that often undervalue youth agency and potential. Youth leadership also contributes to shifts in power dynamics that lead to safer, more equal, and more engaging school environments.

Outcomes

Our intended outcomes include:

1. Improved lifeskills and decision making.
2. Increased agency, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
3. Enhanced gender equality and more equal interpersonal dynamics.
4. Safer and less authoritarian school environments.
5. More engaged classrooms in which all learners have opportunities to thrive.

Our theory of change illustrates how our activities lead to more engaged students and safer, more equal, and more participatory schools. With robust research and advocacy components, these programs successes will lead to improved learning outcomes and a stronger school system.



Activities

New students start DIY with a set of foundational trainings focused on lifeskills. These modules, which are facilitated through interactive exercises, include: self-awareness, communication, problem solving, goal setting, positive attitude, and decision making. Building on this foundation, we provide sessions on health education, gender norms, community engagement, and program planning. For students in subsequent years who have already been through the foundational trainings, we have a menu of capacity building sessions from which they can choose.

After the trainings, DIY members take the lead, designing projects that address student-identified needs in their schools and communities. This is the key component of the DIY program – learning through the participatory process itself. From conducting a needs assessment, to planning and implementation, students are involved in genuine, meaningful ways. Below are some of the inspirational projects DIY members have designed:

- **Waste Paper Project:** Collecting waste paper in classrooms and using that paper to fabricate waste bins. The students then sell the bins as an entrepreneurial venture.
- **Equality Starts Now!** Working to change gender norms in their school and provide education on gender-based violence.

In order to be successful in creating more conducive learning environments, we also address the other side of the equation – teachers. Through DIY we engage teachers in their own personal reflections and growth, with the aim of positively affecting teacher-student dynamics. Training topics for teachers include self-awareness, psychosocial support, youth-adult partnerships, harmful gender norms, student-centered pedagogy, and alternatives to corporal punishment.

The curriculum [at our school] has been spiced by DIY. The hands-on-approach is in line with the Ministry of Education policy advocating practical skills. Because of DIY, our school is now unique among others. There is a cordial and consultative atmosphere between the teachers and the club members, removing the fear factor, thus narrowing the student-teacher gap.

– School Administrator, IDI

Pathways of Change

- Acquiring new skills & confidence via youth-led projects
- Modeling new roles/attitudes among peers
- Adopting student-centered, equitable pedagogies in classrooms
- Balancing power between boys & girls, teachers & students, etc.
- Expanding perspectives on youth potential within schools

Importantly, while DIY has an intense focus on club members and teachers who participate directly, our program theory posits that program effects will “spill-over” and diffuse throughout the school as DIY participants begin to adopt and model positive attitudes and behaviors. We have also observed that as teachers and administrators encounter examples of student leadership, their own views on youth capacity and potential begin to expand. Cumulatively these pathways of change are expected to lead to improved lifeskills, increased agency, greater participation, and a more engaging and safer school environment for all learners.

A Focus on Girls

Our mission is to “facilitate radical change in the Ugandan health and education systems.” A key component of that radical change is shifting harmful gender norms and promoting gender equality. Please [click here](#) to watch a video highlighting our gender-transformative work.

While we strive to shift all power dynamics in schools, we acknowledge that girls are subject to higher rates of discrimination, oppression, sexual-harassment and intimate partner violence than their male peers, and often experience fewer academic and economic opportunities. Thus, while gender equality is a cross cutting theme throughout DIY, we emphasize *specific* approaches to supporting girls and addressing their unique needs.