



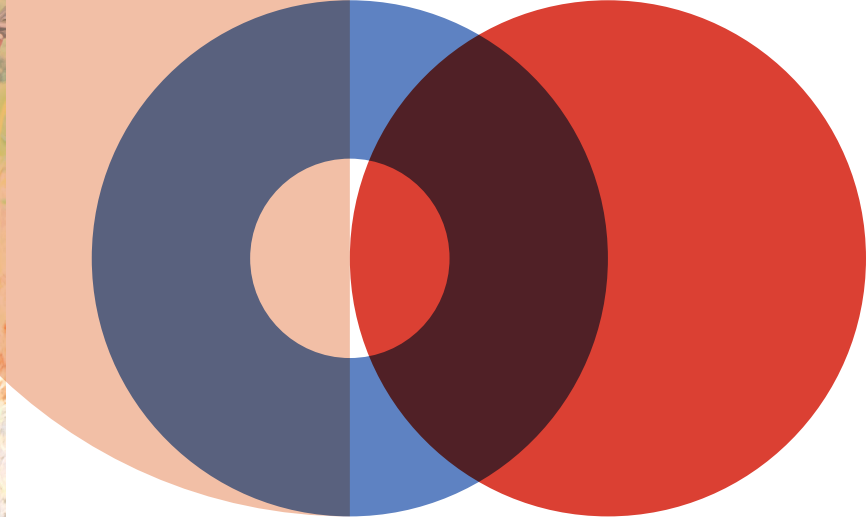
SKILLS FOR A  
CHANGING WORLD

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# Skills for a Changing World

**Executive Summary: National  
Perspectives and the Global Movement**

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# Executive summary

The Skills for a Changing World project presents evidence of a movement of education systems globally toward a more explicit focus on a broad range of skills that our 21st century society needs and demands. This movement can be seen in the vision and mission statements of education systems as well as through their curricula. Although clearly endorsed at the policy level, implementation is just beginning in some countries. The issues surrounding this, particularly in the context of within-country social and economic changes, are brought to light in this report by a study of education stakeholders in four countries—Mexico, South Africa, Kenya, and the Philippines.

Public education systems across 113 countries have defined education as being much more than equipping students with basic academic skills or technical skills for the world of work. A large number of countries identify specific skills such as problem solving and communication as valuable, and a smaller number of countries provide additional details about how these skills are integrated into the curriculum and how they are expected to develop through the years of formal education.

The broader society in which each student exists influences his understanding of what is important and

what is valued. We sought to understand the attitudes and perceptions of key education stakeholders by reviewing the education space in Mexico, South Africa, Kenya, and the Philippines, which have all recently extended mandated years of education and/or included a focus on 21st century skills in their offerings to students. Through interviews and focus groups, parents, community members, teachers, teacher trainers, and education administration and policy personnel answered two primary questions concerning skills most highly valued in their communities: (1) What are the skills you associate with a successful person?; and (2) What are the skills that are important for children and students to develop?

For both questions, responses from the stakeholders were organized into four categories—21st century skills, academic skills, character traits, and workforce and society characteristics.

Overall, when describing factors of success and identifying highly valued skills, three broad patterns are noticeable: (1) There are differences between the stakeholder groups that work closely with the child (i.e., parents, teachers) and the groups that are more distant from the child (i.e., teacher trainers, non-government, and government actors); (2) certain skills

and traits are mentioned by all countries; and, (3) there are clear differences between countries in the factors and skills that are highly valued and emphasized.

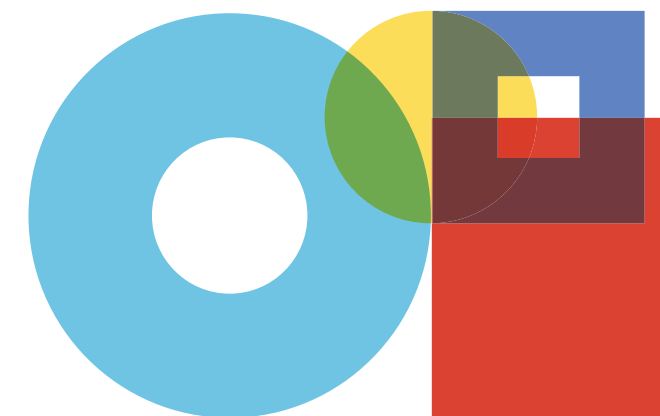
In terms of characterizing the *factors for success*, the skills most frequently mentioned were communication, social and interpersonal skills as a generic skillset, and critical and analytical thinking. However, 21st century skills, for the most part, were not associated with how *parents* defined success. Parents, instead, endorsed characteristics such as confidence, independence and responsibility, being productive members of society, happiness, and possessing appropriate morals and values as the most important. In contrast, 21st century skills are featured as contributors to success for the more distant stakeholder groups. Across all four countries, *non-government* and *government personnel* emphasized communication, social skills, critical thinking, and technology and computer skills.

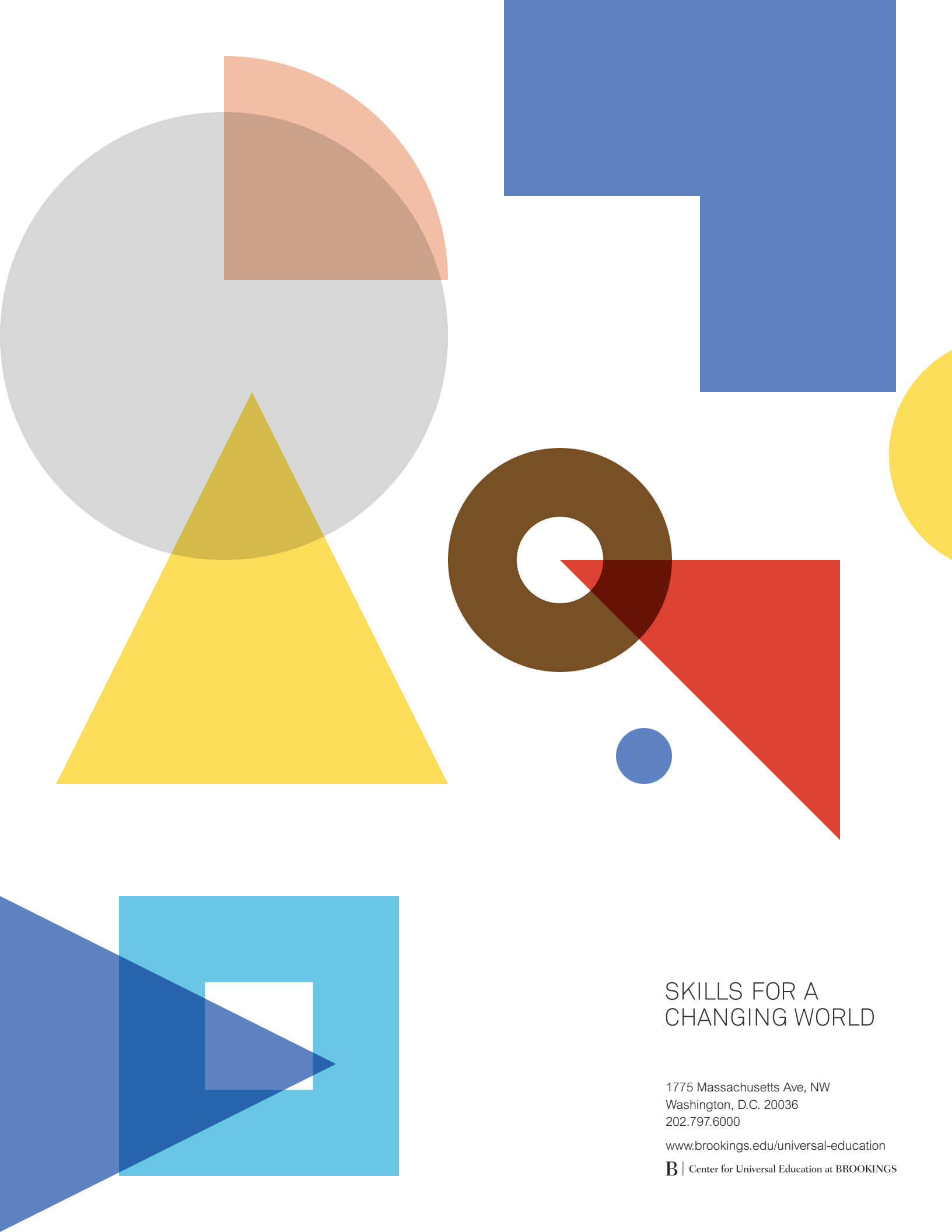
The skills that are highly valued for learners, however, include a broad range of 21st century skills, such as collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, social and interpersonal skills, technology and computer skills, and listening skills—these all being mentioned most frequently by parents and teachers. School administrators and teacher trainers placed greater emphasis on critical and analytical thinking, self-regulation, and academic skills. Government personnel tended to evenly nominate 21st century and academic skills, character traits, and workforce and society characteristics. At the broadest level, therefore, data indicated that workforce and society characteristics seem to be associated mainly with *success*, whereas 21st century skills and academic skills are *highly valued* for the learner.

Overall, evidence from the four countries points to the fact that socio-economic realities and politics clearly influence the views of the stakeholders about what education is offering and how it is changing. The views help to define some of the challenges faced, including the big one—*how* to teach and assess these new areas of focus in the education system. Understanding that children need a particular set of skills to live constructively in the 21st century is not the same as an in depth understanding of what those skills are, how they develop, or how to teach them.

## KEY FINDINGS

1. Stakeholders across all four countries highly value 21st century skills for learners. This pattern is different from factors of success, where character traits and workforce and society characteristics are emphasized.
2. Within each country, there appears to be tension between recognizing the importance of holistically-developed learners and the current structures of the education system that limits what is feasible to accomplish in classrooms.
3. Attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders reflect the priorities of each country. Countries may face similar challenges and emphasize the same kinds of skills, but the current context and priorities of each individual country drive the unique perspectives and the conversations surrounding educational issues.
4. Stakeholder groups who work closely with the learner (i.e., parents and teachers), as well as government personnel, emphasize the importance of skills for success. However, the stakeholder groups in between (i.e., teacher trainers, representatives from nongovernmental organizations) were sparse in identifying the factors and skills related to success, despite the fact that these groups have a say in *how* to implement in classrooms and train teachers.





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