

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Advancing children's civil and political rights in 21st century education systems



Photo by Doug Linstedt on Unsplash

Contents

Abbreviations..... 1

Introduction 2

Children’s civil and political rights and responsibilities in and through education: a rights-based development imperative 3

 The right: equal access to education that promotes civil and political rights and responsibilities 3

 The development imperative: promoting children’s civil and political rights in and through education 5

Responsibilities on ministries of education 7

Defining features of a quality education system capable of building the foundations for rights-based sustainable development..... 8

Do education systems meet the challenges of the 21st century? 9

The 21st century education movement: advocacy and guiding framework for rights-based transformation of education to drive sustainable development..... 11

What reforms are required? 13

 What needs to change? 14

 How to achieve whole-system transformation: curriculum reform 15

Abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CESCR	Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GC X	General Comment No. X (by the United Nations Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

Introduction

Children are rights-holders and as such are responsible for supporting social cohesion, inclusive socio-economic development, peace and tolerance, and the socio-economic development of their families, schools, communities and societies. They have a duty to do so through their meaningful engagement as citizens, in accordance with their evolving capacities.

Children’s rights include socio-economic entitlements such as basic education, as well as civil and political rights. The latter are often represented as the right to participate in all decisions that affect them—which is the foundation of engaged citizenship in a democratic society. However, children’s civil and political rights extend beyond their right to participate—they embrace a suite of enabling rights recognized and protected by the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (ACRWC) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) as being essential to the meaningful participation of all children in accordance with their evolving capacities.¹

Children’s civil and political rights necessary to participate as engaged citizens

1. The right to express their own views: the right to be heard in all matters affecting them, and to have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (evolving capacities)
2. Freedom of expression: the right to express their views without fear or prejudice
3. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion: the right to hold their own views and practise their religion of choice, subject to their parents’ right to guide them
4. Freedom of association: the right to join groups or associations for expressing shared viewpoints
5. Protection of privacy: the right to protection from interference with their privacy
6. Access to information: children have a right to information and governments have a responsibility to ensure that children have access to information that is socially and culturally relevant through a diversity of sources, including the media.

Children’s education and their civil and political rights are inter-dependent. Each is essential to realizing the other and to enabling children to fulfil their responsibilities as engaged citizens in the 21st century.

The African Union’s *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (ACRWC) and the United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), as well as the UN’s *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), *Africa’s Agenda 2063* and *Agenda for Children 2040*, require governments to promote children’s rights in and through education, including their civil and political rights. These treaties recognize that the purpose of education is transformative—to drive rights-based, sustainable development. They further recognize that advancing and realizing children’s agency through their civil and political rights in and through teaching and learning is a precondition for attainment of the prescribed aims of education: to

¹ Articles 12–17 of the CRC; Article 7–10 of the ACRWC & UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) *General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard* (Article 12)

prepare children to be active and engaged citizens in 21st century social, economic, political and cultural life, and in so doing, to be the drivers of sustainable development.

The 21st century education agenda is a global movement that calls for and provides guidance on how to transform education systems so that they enable, empower and capacitate children to meet the demands, opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. There are significant synergies between the goals, objectives and underlying rationale of the 21st century agenda and rights-based development education imperatives.

This advocacy brief has been developed to motivate ministries of education across Africa to prioritize the transformation of their education systems within a 21st century learning framework, in order to realize children's civil and political rights in and through education, and in so doing, lay the foundations of sustainable development for the continent. The brief provides an overview of:

- Current rights-based development imperatives and the underlying rationale to realize children's civil and political rights in and through education
- The associated responsibilities on education sectors to take concrete steps to realize children's civil and political rights by mainstreaming these across all elements of their systems
- Progress to date and what education sectors in Africa need to do to achieve the purpose of education
- Synergies between the rights-based development imperative and the 21st century education movement and framework, and an overview of how it should and can be embraced and used to strengthen education's transformative role as the driver of sustainable rights-based development of the African continent

Children's civil and political rights and responsibilities in and through education: a rights-based development imperative

The right: equal access to education that promotes civil and political rights and responsibilities

Human and children's rights treaties guarantee all children an equal right to quality education. Quality education is defined as education that achieves its prescribed purpose: to prepare, enable and empower children for equal, full and active participation in all aspects of life—social, economic, cultural, civic and political—by promoting realization of children's rights that enable them to participate in this way.

Achieving this purpose requires the provision of education that empowers and enables children to participate meaningfully as engaged citizens in civil and political life, in accordance with their evolving capacities, through the realization of their civil and political rights and responsibilities in and through education.

The ACRWC guarantees every child the right to an education that:

- Fosters respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and

- Prepares the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, tolerance, dialogue, mutual respect and friendship among all ethnic, tribal and religious groups²

The CRC similarly states that:

Education of the child shall be directed to ... the preparation of the child for responsible life in free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples.³

The Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) reiterates the aim and role of education as being to secure the full development of people, to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to:

Enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.⁴

General Comments No. 1: The Aims of Education (GC 1)⁵ and No. 13: The Right to Education (GC 13)⁶ emphasize that education is an enabling right.

GC 1 states that education “in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and live a full and satisfying life within society.”⁷

GC 13 identifies education as “both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has a vital role in ... promoting human rights and democracy ... [it is] one of the best financial investments States can make.”⁸

The right to education is about more than just access to schools; it is critically about the content and quality of education. It must serve as a vehicle to enable the child to achieve “in the course of her or his life a balanced, human-rights-friendly response to the challenges” that must be navigated and overcome to become an active and meaningful participant in modern society.⁹

This means the right to education is about advancing children’s rights and responsibilities—including civil and political—to enable them to become active and engaged citizens. To this end, children should,

² Article 11 2(b) and (d)

³ Article 29.1(d)

⁴ Article 13

⁵ United Nations (2001) *General Comment No.1, Article 29(1): The Aims of Education*. Geneva: UN.

⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1999) *General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art.13)*. Geneva: CESCR.

⁷ Paragraph 2

⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) (1999) *General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art.13)*. Geneva: CESCR.

⁹ United Nations (2001) *General Comment No.1, Article 29(1): The Aims of Education*. Geneva: UN.

through education, be enabled and empowered to participate fully and meaningfully in all aspects of modern society, and to overcome the challenges and grasp the opportunities they are likely to face in everyday life. This requires that they acquire basic knowledge, skills and competencies that go beyond numeracy and literacy, to include the life skills they need to be active and responsible citizens. Therefore education must include the skills, attitudes, practices and competencies necessary to participate in the social and economic, as well as the civil and political dimensions of a democratic society.

The development imperative: promoting children’s civil and political rights in and through education

Globally and across Africa, governments have committed to change the way they function in order to end poverty and inequality permanently.

The global *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*¹⁰, and Africa’s *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*¹¹ and *Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children*¹² commit to achieving lasting social and economic development that is:

- People-centred and
- Rights-based

The common thread running through the development agendas is the understanding that securing and sustaining social and economic development depends on realizing the rights of every person, especially the most marginalized and socially excluded—including children. There is general agreement that sustainable development requires inclusion, and this requires not only that people enjoy their social and economic rights, but that they enjoy equal civil and political rights. Lasting development requires transformation, not just of economies, but of the civil and political dimensions of society, to ensure the social, economic, civil and political inclusion of all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

The development instruments emphasize that development cannot be sustained unless it is driven by empowered and engaged citizens. It requires that people are not viewed and do not act as mere beneficiaries of benefits such as water, sanitation, and a healthy and sustainable environment. The sustainable development agenda emphasizes the importance of rights, and equally the associated responsibility on all people, including children, to exercise their rights and engage actively in all dimensions of society—social, economic, cultural, civil and political—as active citizens who drive the changes and hold decision-makers accountable for the changes needed to secure safety, peace, prosperity and equality.

¹⁰ United Nations (2018). *The Sustainable Development Agenda*. Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals: <https://www.un.org.sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda>

¹¹ *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (2015):

///C:/Users/patri/Downloads/Agenda_2063_The_Africa_We_Want.pdf

¹² Page 2

The sustainable development agenda is built on the concept of inclusive development driven by all people, especially the historically marginalized, including children, women and people with disabilities. This requires that governments take measures to empower and enable every person, including children, to participate in civil and political life and contribute to finding, implementing and holding decision-makers to account for solutions to development problems.

The success of the SDG agenda depends on social transformation which brings about an equalization in the power and participation of all, especially the historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities who have thus far been social, economically and politically excluded. This requires not only equalization of access to services related to socio-economic rights, but also equalization of the power people have over decisions on how resources are used for the realization of their rights. It requires a transformation of the civic and political relationships and arrangements so that historically marginalized people are not just regarded as beneficiaries of services waiting for others to provide solutions. It also requires the democratization of society so that all people, especially the historically marginalized, are active and engaged citizens who are empowered and enabled to participate in civil and political life to make decisions about resources and services, and that they are recognized as agents of the change they want to see.

In short, sustainable development is dependent on the realization of the social and economic, civil and political rights of all, especially the historically marginalized and disenfranchised, including children and youth.

Therefore **SDG 16 sees the right to participate in political life as a foundation of sustainable development. The SDG agenda places as much importance on building democratic structures and processes for the meaningful and peaceful exercise of civil and political rights as on the substantive social and economic goals. Goal 16 is to: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”** The associated targets reflect the transformation required to achieve Goal 16 and related goals. For example, Target 16.7 requires that governments: **Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.**

At the heart of the link between political inclusion and sustainable development is the recognition that civil and political agency is the engine of sustainable development. Development can only be sustained when all people have the capacity and power to be active and engaged citizens and exercise their civil and political rights in driving solutions to shared problems. This in turn requires effective, transparent, inclusive and democratic institutions at all levels of society; that create, protect and promote the conditions and capacities necessary to enable people’s agency.

African countries are united in their commitment to an African Renaissance driven by sustainable development. The SDG vision has been domesticated by the African Union of the people of Africa for the people of Africa, including its children The African sustainable development vision is captured in the

African Union's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*: "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena."¹³

Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children, adopted by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2017, recognizes that children and youth must be the drivers of Africa's Renaissance; that "[s]ecuring future progress, peaceful co-existence and welfare lies in their hands". It further recognizes that "to allow them to take charge of Africa's future, their full potential has to be unlocked by fully protecting and realising their rights".¹⁴

This in turn depends on the continent's education systems' ability to enable and empower children to meet the challenges and opportunities of 21st century Africa. Education is recognized as the engine that drives transformation by enabling children's agency as engaged citizens through realizing and exercising their rights to drive Africa's inclusive sustainable social, economic, political and cultural development.

Responsibilities on ministries of education

Education systems must drive transformation to secure inclusive and sustainable rights-based development.

To do so, education systems must be inclusive of all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, and provide teaching and learning to prepare children to meet the opportunities and challenges of a 21st century democratic development state.

Together, the human rights treaties and development charters clearly define the responsibilities on education systems. Education systems must advance children's agency—that is, their capacity to engage as responsible citizens—by ensuring that their civil and political responsibilities and associated rights are a core concern of the education: that advancing children's civil and political responsibilities and rights inform the education system and the curriculum through which it is to be realized.

Thus, rights such as the right to participate in decisions that affect them, to have and voice an opinion, to associate freely with others, and to have access to information systems, should be an integral and defining feature of the curriculum, as well as the processes and structures of the education system—the learning environment, the approach to teaching and learning, and the decision-making processes.

Ensuring children's agency is the foundation of a human-rights-based society and education system. It requires that education advances children's civil and political rights.

Human rights education requires that education systems **empower** children with knowledge and **enable** the exercise of their civil and political rights. It requires, not just that children are taught about their rights, but that all levels of the education system reflect and integrate children's rights principles and practices

¹³ *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (2015):

///C:/Users/patri/Downloads/Agenda_2063_The_Africa_We_Want.pdf

¹⁴ Page 2

into their daily experience of education.¹⁵ Human rights education requires more than formal teaching—it requires the “promotion of values and policies conducive to human rights ... within schools [and] also within the broader community”.¹⁶

To achieve rights-based education discussed above requires the transformation of education systems. The expectations of education systems and the responsibility of education ministries on the African continent are defined in *Africa’s Agenda for Children*.

Africa’s Agenda for Children requires that, by 2040, education systems must ensure that:

All learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

Defining features of a quality education system capable of building the foundations for rights-based sustainable development

Education systems must be transformative in their design and outcomes. Specifically, education systems and schools must recognize and advance children’s agency through the realization of their civil and political responsibilities and rights in and through education.

To do this, education systems must mainstream children’s civil and political responsibilities and rights in an integrated manner, through a comprehensive curriculum that prepares all children for meaningful civic and political participation in a 21st century peaceful and democratic society.

The education system must develop the knowledge, skills, capacities and competencies children need to exercise their civic and political responsibilities through the responsible exercise of their associated rights, including:

- Knowledge of their rights and responsibilities
- Knowledge of 21st century development challenges and solutions, including children’s responsibilities to be engaged citizens
- Knowledge of how society and political processes work
- Access to information from a diversity of sources on a comprehensive range of subjects, especially those impacting on development

¹⁵ GC 1, Paragraph 15

¹⁶ GC 1, Paragraph 19

- The skills and competencies to use and share information effectively, to identify and solve problems, as well as to inform and ensure their effective participation in decision-making processes to influence decisions
- Critical reasoning skills
- Conflict management skills
- The ability to make rational or reasoned choices, as well as understand the consequences of their choices
- Tolerance of, and respect for differences in viewpoints and opinions
- The capacities and competencies to freely express their opinions in a respectful, motivated and reasoned manner, and importantly the capacity and knowledge of the duty to listen respectfully and consider the views of others, even if they differ from their own
- Skills to communicate effectively and respectfully
- Rhetorical skills

Education systems must develop these skills and competencies to support the evolution of children's capacities to participate in all decisions that affect them.

This in turn requires education systems to provide a rights-based, child-centred 21st century teaching and learning environment that fosters their social and economic, as well as their civil and political knowledge competencies, skills and outcomes through their integration into all components of the education system, including:

- Teaching content
- Pedagogy
- Teaching and learning environment, including infrastructure and teaching and learning support materials
- Educator qualifications, qualities, attitudes and practices
- Socially cohesive policies and values governing relationships at all levels of the system
- Policies and practices governing relationships and partnerships with schools, parents and communities
- Decision-making, leadership and governance policies, practices and institutions

Do education systems meet the challenges of the 21st century?

Historically, education systems across the world have generally not met the challenge. Education systems, including those on the African continent, have tended to respond to outdated needs and challenges of the last century and have, rather than serving to drive and sustain development, perpetuated poverty and inequities among historically marginalized communities.¹⁷ The reasons are many, but at the heart of the

¹⁷ *Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa fit for children*

problem is the poor quality of education, especially for the most vulnerable, that does not prepare children for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century.¹⁸

Education systems have tended to:

- Provide education that prepares children for the industrial rather than the information age
- Be designed to produce “well-behaved” children that listen when spoken to and speak when told to; that are seen and see themselves as beneficiaries rather than agents of change with rights and responsibilities to shape the world around them

There has been growing awareness of the limitations of outdated education systems, especially within the sustainable development framework. Several countries, including those on the African continent, have engaged in curriculum reform and review processes with the objective of modernizing their education systems to better prepare children for the 21st century.

A review of the resulting revised curriculum frameworks shows some progress. However, developments have often not been adequate to drive the transformation required for achieving rights-based sustainable development.

A critical gap is the failure to recognize children’s agency and the importance of children’s civil and political rights. This has resulted in the neglect, within reform processes, of measures to realize children’s civil and political rights in and through the education system. As in the case of all other rights and domains of life, the education system is responsible for enabling children’s civic and political agency by advancing their knowledge of, and capacity to exercise their associated rights across the full spectrum of the education system. For many of the countries that have engaged in 21st century reform, their emphasis falls on social and economic rights and preparing children for engaging in the 21st century workplace and economy. The focus of reforms is thus, for the most part, on enabling the skills and content knowledge children need to participate in an information-based economy, with little attention paid to their civic and political engagement.

This failure to recognize and advance children’s civil and political rights in and through education systems will frustrate the realization of the aims of education, create obstacles for education systems to honour their commitments and fulfil their responsibilities, and ultimately undermine sustainable development. Sustainable development is fueled by inclusive growth, which depends on equitable and meaningful access to, and inclusion in, more than just the economy and services such as health. It requires equal and meaningful civic and political engagement by all, including children, people with disabilities, women and those living in poverty.

To fulfil their development potential and responsibilities, education systems must be reviewed and strengthened to recognize, protect and promote children’s civil and political rights in and through education.

¹⁸ SADC and MIET AFRICA (2012) *CSTL Regional Report: a review of care and support for teaching and learning in the SADC region*. MIET AFRICA.

The 21st century education movement: advocacy and guiding framework for rights-based transformation of education to drive sustainable development

The requirements of an education system capable of meeting current developmental and legal imperatives are captured and advanced through the 21st century education movement and planning framework. It enjoys global recognition and education sector approval as a credible framework, and is used across the world to plan educational reforms to achieve the aims of education in the 21st century. There are significant synergies in underlying rationale and approach of the 21st century learning movement and the rights-based sustainable development education imperatives. The requirements of 21st century education systems, as articulated by the 21st century planning framework, are implicitly required by international, regional and national children's rights and development instruments and charters such as the ACRWC, the SDGs and national development plans.

The synergies between the 21st century education framework and rights-based development responsibilities create a duty on Africa's Ministries of Education to engage in holistic education reform within the 21st century education framework to advance children's agency by mainstreaming children's civil and political rights in and through education.

The underlying rationale of the 21st century framework is explained by the Partnership for 21st century Skills as follows:

The 21st century skills concept is motivated by the belief that teaching students the most relevant, useful, in-demand, and universally applicable skills should be prioritized in today's schools, and by the related belief that many schools may not sufficiently prioritize such skills or effectively teach them to students. The basic idea is that students who will come of age in the 21st century, need to be taught different skills than those learned by students in the 20th century, and that the skills they learn should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society.¹⁹

The central unifying concept that shapes the 21st century planning framework is that of learner agency. 21st century learning and teaching is centred on unlocking and supporting the exercise of learner agency.

¹⁹ <https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills/>

Learner agency is the power to exercise civil and political rights and responsibilities to change one’s environment and address challenges in and through education. It requires education systems to ensure that all learners have the knowledge, capacity, skills and competencies to exercise their agency within the school setting and more broadly in society. Learner agency is the power of learners to be the agents of the change they want to see by taking meaningful and informed action to pursue the results they would like to see. It has been defined as follows:²⁰

Learner agency is:

The capacity to behave as purposeful, reflective and responsible social beings, exercising choice, and actively seeking to achieve goals which have been understood and endorsed. Learner agency is a foundation of the “complex person’s” capacity to cope with strategic uncertainty and transformations of the complex society.

[It] includes three components:

- Ownership (teaching and learning processes which build self-efficacy)
- Leadership (processes which give students the opportunity to lead the direction of change)
- Voice (processes that increase students’ influence over their learning environment)

These dimensions of student agency can be exercised across multiple levels of the system: in the classroom, in the school, and in a larger learning ecosystem. It is essential that student agency begins in the class and becomes an indispensable element of the curriculum.

Table 1: Knowledge, skills, capacities and competencies required for 21st century education for sustainable rights-based development

Knowledge, skills, capacities and competencies required of education for sustainable rights-based development	21st century skills and competencies required to unlock learner agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of rights and responsibilities • Knowledge of 21st century development challenges and solutions, including children’s responsibilities to be engaged citizens • Knowledge of how society and political arrangements work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, synthesizing information • Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning • Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, personal expression

²⁰ GELP (2017) Transforming education for complexity: Why, what and how. Report on GELP Moscow 2017 Conference Results. Moscow: GELP, Global Education Futures, Global Venture Alliance. P.30.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information from a diversity of sources on a comprehensive range of subjects, especially those impacting on development • The ability to use information effectively to identify and solve problems, as well as use information to inform and ensure their effective participate in decision-making processes and to influence decisions • Critical reasoning • Conflict management • The ability to make rational or reasoned choices, as well as understand the consequences of their choices • Tolerance of difference • Freedom of expression and opinion • Communication skills • Rhetoric skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, initiative • Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening • Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, facility in using virtual workspaces • Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programming • Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy • Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism • Global awareness, multicultural literacy, humanitarianism • Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method • Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystems understanding • Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety
---	---

What reforms are required?

The reforms required to ensure that education systems build the foundations of sustainable development are the same as those required of the 21st century education movement.

As shown in Figure 1 below, both require whole-system reform or transformation of the education system to make it fit for purpose and able to meet the needs of the 21st century learner with the competencies and skills to participate as engaged and active citizen in school and in the broader social, economic and political society.

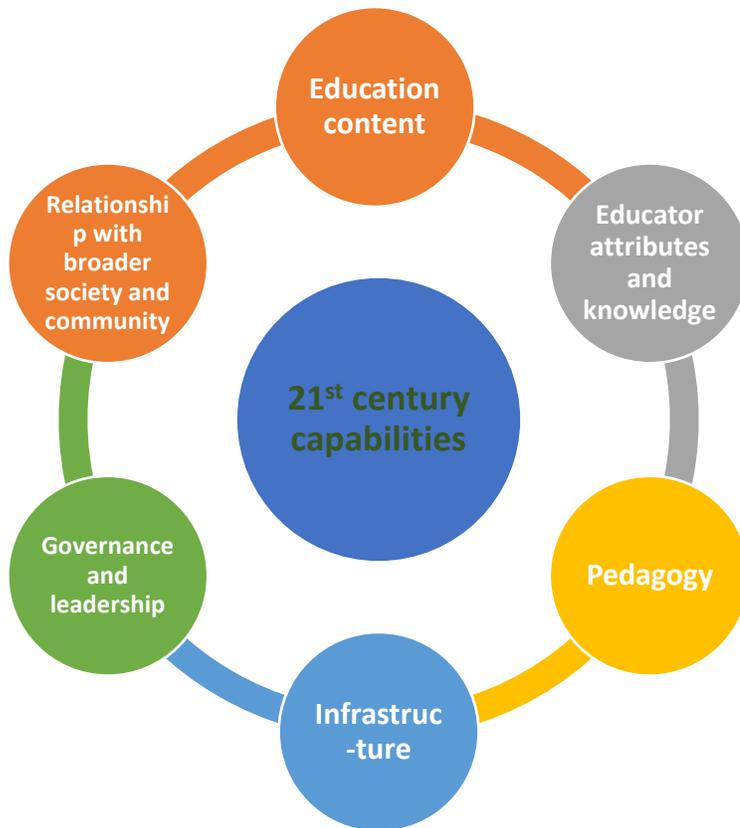


Figure 1: 21st century capabilities

21st century education transformation requires whole-system change. It cannot be achieved by only changing the subjects/content taught in schools. It requires reorientation of the whole system to realize the purpose of education.

What needs to change?

Teaching content: should include civil and political rights, information about society, democracy and political processes, as well as maths, science, languages, etc.

Teaching methodologies, teacher attitudes and teaching and learning materials: should support development of competencies and exercise of learner agency. They should cultivate skills and competencies such as accessing and using information from a diversity of sources, the use of information for evidence-based reasoning, analysis, recognition of consequences, and tolerance of opposing views, etc.

Infrastructure: should support open dialogue and access to relevant and up to date information, as well as facilitate connections with broader social and political dialogue spaces.

Learner action and agency: Schools and learners must become the change we want to see. This requires that children must not only be taught the subject in theory; they must be allowed to put their knowledge into practice.

I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand.
– Confucius

Practising what you learn is essential to achieve 21st century education's purpose. In as much as you can't teach a child about technology without allowing them to use it, so too you cannot teach a child about rights and civic responsibility without letting them exercise these. This means that children should be given the opportunity to exercise their agency through inclusive and participatory school governance, teaching and learning methodology, etc. These should allow children to exercise skills and competencies—to put their learning into practice as active citizens of the school community. They should enable children's agency as shapers, agents of change and decision-makers about their school and education through, for example:

- Democratic school governance structures that include children
- Debate as a teaching method
- School newspapers
- Peer support groups

Partnerships and networks: Education, schools and curriculum must become facilitative learning ecosystems. The purpose of 21st century education is complex and multi-faceted: it is to prepare children for social, economic and political life—to empower and enable them to participate fully at all levels of society. This requires that education / teaching and learning be equally multifaceted and linked to all levels of society and life. Teachers cannot be experts and teach across all subject areas. This requires that schools be supported to become facilitators of education; nodes that facilitate partnerships and networks of educators that provide children with a rich and complex body of teaching and learning to equip them for the 21st century challenges and opportunities. Schools should facilitate children's access to:

- Media
- Politicians
- Human rights institutes
- Civil society

How to achieve whole-system transformation: curriculum reform

The need for systemic transformation is often expressed as a need for **curriculum reform** that supports the development of 21st century knowledge, skills and competencies, including civil and political skills. Curriculum reform, if appropriately understood and sufficiently holistic, is the vehicle that can drive whole system change.

Curriculum is not just the subjects that are taught. It is the foundation of the whole education system and provides the overarching framework to ensure that the parts work together to achieve the overall purpose of education. It provides:

- The why
- The what
- The how
- The who

It articulates the vision and purpose of the education system and provides the road map for designing a fit-for-purpose system across

- Curriculum content
- Educator qualities
- Pedagogy
- Infrastructure
- Teaching and learning resources
- Relationships with community
- Leadership and governance

Therefore, all ministries of education should engage in a holistic process of curriculum reform to realize children's agency through the mainstreaming of their civil and political rights to achieve the transformational purpose of education.