

# “Soft” Skills that Open Doors

Laura Lippman, Child Trends

CIES Conference

March 12, 2015



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



## Laura Lippman

Senior Research Scientist, Child Trends

*Other project contributors:*

Rachel Carney, Renee Ryberg and Kristin Moore, **Child Trends**  
Obed Diener, Lara Goldmark, and Kristin Brady, **FHI360**  
Clare Ignatowski and Rachel Blum, **USAID Office of Education**



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by **conducting high-quality research and sharing the resulting knowledge** with practitioners and policymakers.

We . . .

1. take a whole child/youth approach
2. study youth in the real world
3. want youth to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development *and* knowledge transfer

[childtrends.org](http://childtrends.org)



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS

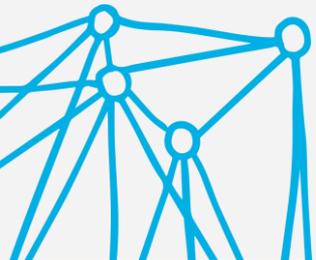


**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# Motivation

- Obtaining employment and becoming financially independent is a critical component in the successful transition to adulthood.
- Yet, **75 million youth** around the world are unemployed.
- Individual factors contribute to youth unemployment including technical, academic, and **“soft skills”**.
- Currently, there is a lack of consensus on which soft skills are the best investments for improving youth workforce outcomes, and how these skills are defined.
- To this end, Child Trends seeks to answer the question,

**“What soft skills are most important for workforce success?”**



# Framework for Linking Individual Skills to Workforce Success

Contextual Factors

- Family
- Schools
- Community
- Job Availability
- Transportation
- Training
- Policies



Soft Skills

Academic Skills

Technical Skills

Employment

Performance & Promotion

Income

Entrepreneurship



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# Methodology

- Reviewing the literature
- Expert & Implementer interviews and focus groups
- Focus groups with youth and employers led by FHI360
- Drawing conclusions across sources and perspectives: *economics, employers, organizational development, workforce development programming, positive youth development, psychology*



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# Soft Skills Literature

Empirical studies

Employer Surveys

Consensus Projects

Other literature

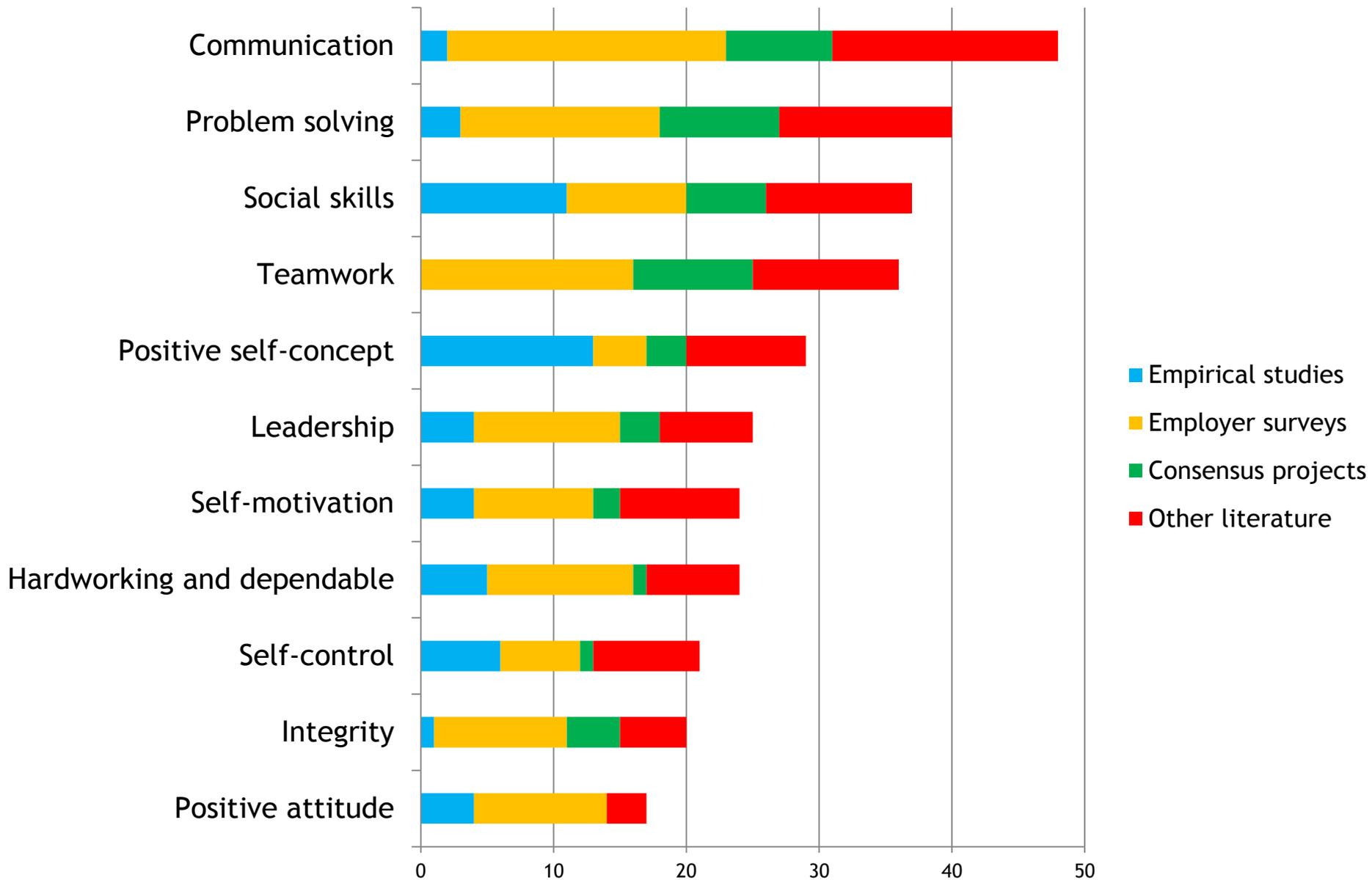


**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

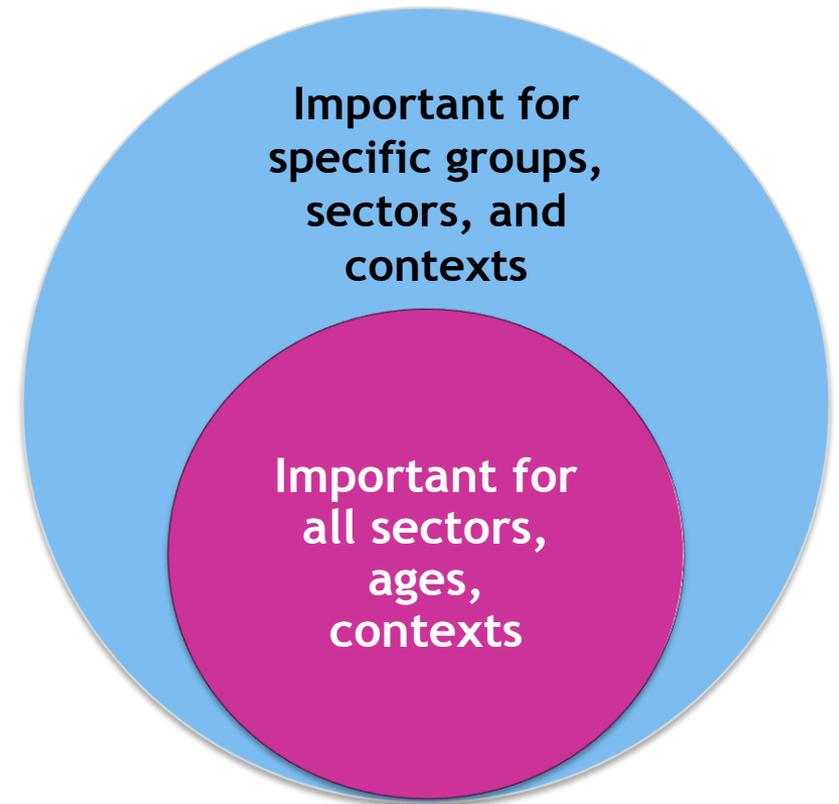
WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



# Considerations in Selection

Are the soft skills ...

- **Linked to workforce outcomes?**
- **Applicable across contexts and sectors?**
- **Malleable?**
- **Developmentally optimal?**



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

**All Outcomes**

**Problem solving**

**Communication**

**Social Skills**

**Self-control**

**Positive attitude**

**Positive self-concept**

**Teamwork**

**Self-motivated**

**Hardworking and dependable**

**Responsibility**

**Specific Workforce Outcomes**

**Employment      Performance      Income      Entrepreneurship**

Problem solving, critical thinking, decision-making      Problem solving, etc.

Communication      Communication

Social Skills

Self-control

Positive attitude      Positive attitude

Positive self-concept      Positive self-concept

Teamwork      Teamwork

Self-motivated

Hard work and dependability

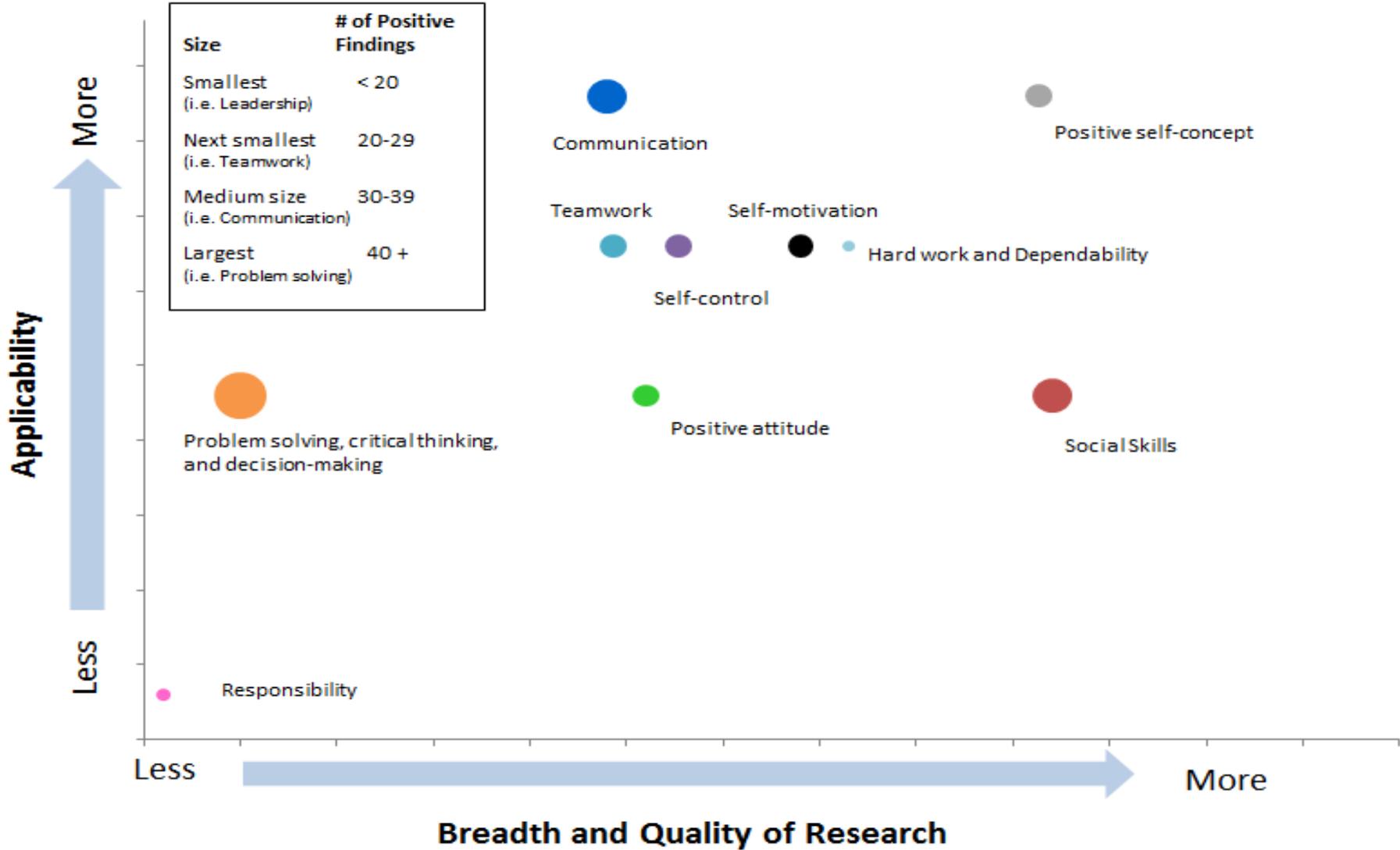
Responsibility

**Key Skills for Specific Outcomes Only**



Cultural sensitivity	Learning and Growth Orientation	Goal Orientation	Initiative
Learning and Growth Orientation	Integrity/Ethics	Integrity/Ethics	Adaptability
Leadership	Persuasive	Leadership	Creativity
			Goal Orientation

# Youth and Entry-Level Literature: Breadth, Quality, and Relevancy

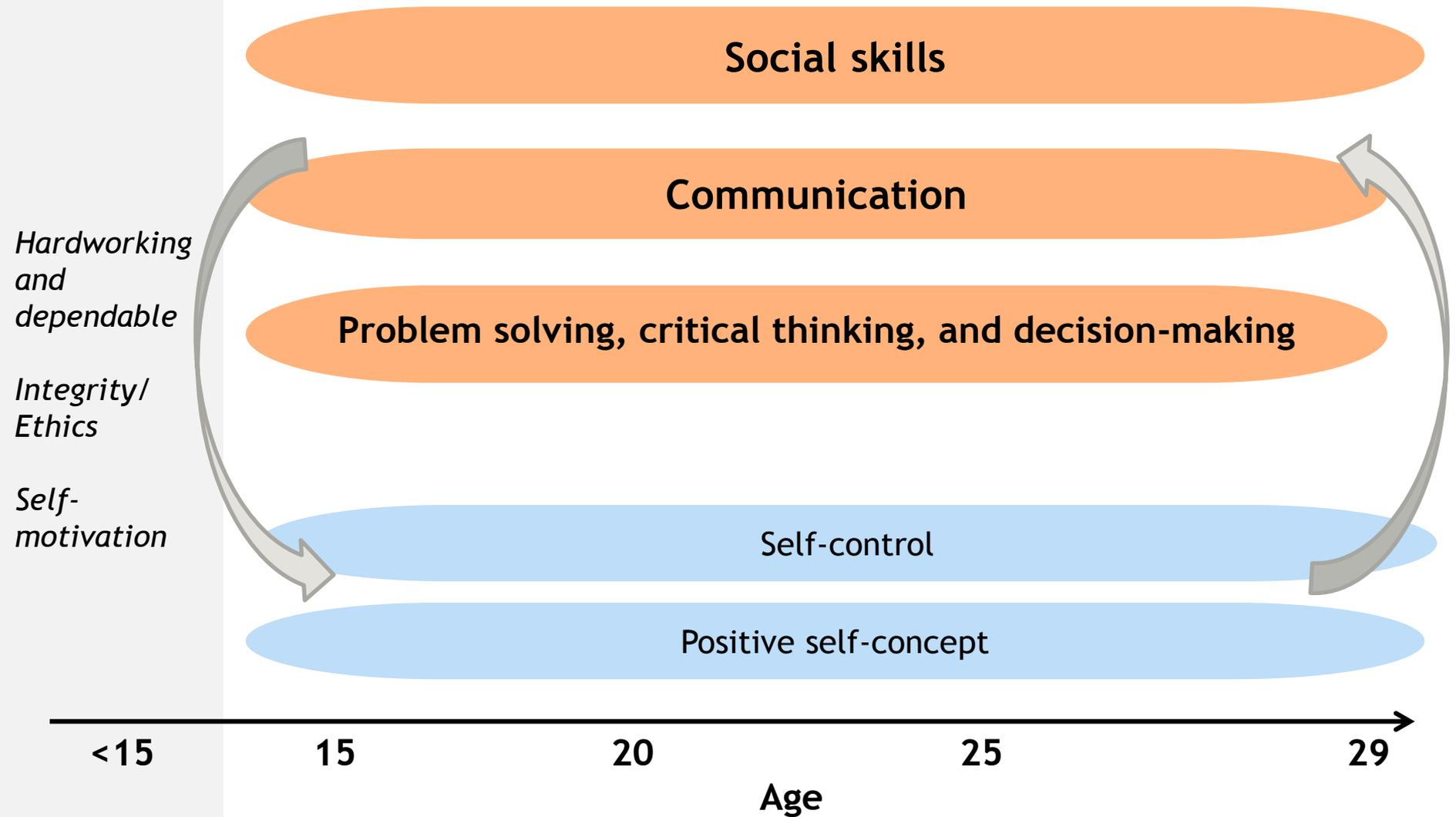


**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



# Conceptual Framework of Key Soft Skills for Youth Employment



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



# Input from Kenya

***Soft skills are of high and increasing importance to employers***

*“I would rather hire a young person who is honest but a little lacking in technical skill than one with great technical skills but lacking in honesty. Technical skills we can always work on and improve.”*

*-- FHI 360 interview with CEO of Aga Khan Hospital*

- Soft skill priorities for private employers: **communication** and **“public relations”** skills.
- Employers emphasize need for increased soft skill development at education and training institutions.

“Basic Report of the Survey on Youth Employment in Kenya,” Government of Kenya, 2014



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# Input from Mozambique

FHI 360 held focus groups to discuss **soft skills** in-depth with:

- 1) Employed youth in formal and informal sectors (16)
- 2) 12 employers (mix of large, medium, small and informal)

## *Priority Soft Skills (translated from Portuguese)*

Youth	Large employers	Medium sized employers	Small/informal employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Humility</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Social skills</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Dependability</li> <li>• Dynamism/initiative</li> <li>• Punctuality/attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Dynamism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honesty</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Punctuality</li> <li>• Hard working</li> <li>• Social skills/ Communication</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Initiative</li> </ul>



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS



# Next Steps

- White paper recommending Youth Employment Soft Skills to prioritize investments in programs being finalized for release this Spring
- Symposium of stakeholders in June 2015
- Collaboration with Soft Skill Measurement efforts



[childtrends.org](http://childtrends.org)

**Contact us:**

Laura Lippman

[llippman@childtrends.org](mailto:llippman@childtrends.org)

Rachel Carney

[rcarney@childtrends.org](mailto:rcarney@childtrends.org)

Kristin Brady

[kbrady@fhi360.org](mailto:kbrady@fhi360.org)



[twitter.com/childtrends](https://twitter.com/childtrends)



[facebook.com/childtrends](https://facebook.com/childtrends)

**Project website: [www.wfconnections.org](http://www.wfconnections.org)**