
POETRY FOR RIGHTS! INTERGENERATIONAL CO-CREATION FOR CHILD RIGHTS SCHOLARSHIP

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Poets and Child Rights Activists and Defenders

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Abstract

This article presents the work of a group of child rights activists including children, young people and a supporting adult, who creatively convey their thoughts and feelings about the most pressing contemporary issues in the field of children's rights and explore implications for intergenerational co-authorship in the child rights space. The children and young people decided to use poetry as a form of communication to express themselves about the challenges and aspirations of being child rights activists in an era of polycrisis, and they then worked together to analyse the poems, identifying cross-cutting themes around mental health, navigating power relationships and demands for

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a more inclusive, equitable future. The text of the article contains links to online video recordings of the authors performing their poetry, inviting readers to immerse themselves in a multi-sensory experience of child-led, child rights scholarship. Accordingly, the article presents an exploration of imaginative, interactive and intergenerational scholarship on children's rights and suggests that co-creation with children may provide a way of upholding children's rights while making space for new epistemologies that challenge Eurocentric, adultist norms of knowledge production in the child rights space.

Keywords: child rights; child participation; arts-based methods.

PART ONE

[A] INTRODUCTION

Nearly 35 years after the launch of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC), the landscape around international child rights in the post-Covid world has become characterized by a narrative of compounding crises. UNICEF (2023) has identified eight trends that constitute the drivers and stressors of the “polycrisis” for children: the long-tail of the Covid-19 pandemic; economic instability and inflation that negatively impact child poverty and wellbeing; food and nutrition insecurity; the energy crisis and climate collapse; underinvestment in children; fragile democracies that undermine civic and political rights, such as freedom of expression; fragmentation of the multilateral system that upholds the international human rights framework; and increased uncertainties and disparities in the digital environment and new technologies. Similarly, since 2020, global child rights advocacy conducted by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been shaped by calls for governments and world leaders to take urgent action to address the cumulative impacts of compounding crises on children, with some notable examples involving children and young people themselves in participatory processes (Save the Children 2021; OSRSG/VAC 2022; Terre des hommes 2022a; Terre des hommes 2022b).

Meanwhile, children around the world continue to be actively involved in civil society movements to claim their right to be heard, as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC. Article 12 is both a substantive right in itself, and a procedural right that is key to fulfilling the full spectrum of rights set out in the Convention. Children's involvement in social justice causes is often intergenerational: child activists often look towards young people aged between 18 and 25, who, only having recently transitioned out of childhood and into adulthood, still acutely feel the precarity of childhood

and the enormity of the compounding crises that threaten children's and adults' human rights. In turn, young activists regularly stand alongside older adults, seeking to learn from the experiences of previous generations of human rights defenders. For example, these intergenerational dynamics are particularly visible in climate activism, in which child- and youth-led movements such as #FridaysForFutures have come to shape the climate justice landscape through direct action and peaceful protest (Nissen & Ors 2021; Skovdal & Benwell 2021). Nevertheless, although some notable cases of impactful child-led climate actions have been documented (Tanner 2010), children and young people's demands for governments to uphold their commitments in line with internationally agreed-upon targets are increasingly ignored, as demonstrated by significant shortfalls in recent climate conference agreements. A sharp contrast exists between the (now ubiquitous) images of children leading the way in climate justice protests and the actual "difference" that child-led activism makes on macro-level environmental policymaking (Trott 2021).

The uneven terrain of intergenerational partnerships in civil society advocacy around children's rights can be understood as reflecting a hierarchy of epistemologies, which need to be analysed through an intersectional lens. Firstly, due to social norms that link children's young ages with an assumed immaturity, children are not listened to. Consequently, through "their very being (onto-): a child is unable to make claims to knowledge, because it is assumed that they are (still) developing, (still) innocent, (still) fragile, (still) immature, (still) irrational" (Murriss 2020: 2). Secondly, the momentum around the decolonization of human rights has raised questions about the ways in which mainstream conceptions of child participation and agency, particularly with respect to children from the Global South, are grounded in Eurocentric, individualist, neocolonial and patriarchal frameworks (Cheney 2018; Abebe 2019). It follows, therefore, that the epistemologies of children and young people from the Global South are more susceptible to being marginalized or "Othered" if they fail to fit within the post-Enlightenment norms that structure the paradigms of universal human rights.

While the repercussions of these hierarchies are apparent in the worlds of policy and practice, they are even more glaring in the realm of child rights scholarship: children and young people, particularly those from the Global South, are very rarely offered meaningful opportunities to be included in academic writing about children's rights. Apart from a handful of notable examples linked to advocacy initiatives in which children and young people have been invited to co-author academic journal articles (Lundy & Ors 2021; Lee & Ors 2022), the formalities and exigencies of

academic publishing often exclude children and young people from playing meaningful roles in generating knowledge about children's rights that are considered to be meaningful in the academic spaces of the Global North.

Against this backdrop, this article presents the work of a group of child rights activists, comprised of children and young people from the Global South and a supporting adult from the Global North, who creatively convey their thoughts and feelings about the most pressing contemporary issues in the field of children's rights through: poetry; thematic analysis of the poetry; and reflections on using poetry as a means to talk about children's rights. Based on this, the authors conclude by exploring implications for intergenerational co-authorship in the child rights space.

[B] METHODOLOGY—WHY POETRY?

The co-authors comprised a group of five children in their teens and six young people aged 18-23 from Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Nepal, alongside a European adult child rights practitioner. The group came together through a global child rights campaign called #CovidUnder19. Formed in April 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the initiative was “born out of the human rights imperative to seek children's views and engage with them so that they can inform and shape national and international responses to the crisis for and with children” (Lundy & Ors 2021: 262). #CovidUnder19 brought together children, young people, UN offices, academics and local and international NGOs to conduct participatory research and advocacy about how children's rights were impacted by the pandemic and its aftermath. With academic leadership from the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, who led the research design and analysis based on their unique child rights-based methodology, #CovidUnder19 rolled out the Life Under Coronavirus survey (Terre des hommes 2020), available in 28 languages including an easy-read version, which received over 26,000 responses from children around the world. The results of the survey provided a unique snapshot into children's perspectives at a moment of unprecedented global crisis, and indicated that “children, right across the world, felt that their governments were not considering children as a priority and were definitely not seeking their views when crucial policy responses to the pandemic were formulated and implemented” (Lundy & Ors 2021: 281).

Working through a process of co-creation, understood as a “knowledge process that employs creativity through arts-based methods as an alternative way to listen to the voices of marginalised communities and involve them in generating shared understandings of their [environments]”

(Hovarth & Carpenter, 2020: 4), the co-authors collectively decided on both the form and the content of the article. Building on Kara's typology of creative methodologies in social science research (2015), the co-authors integrated both an arts-based component in the form of written poetry, alongside a transformational component, in terms of an iterative, group analysis of both the poetry and the process of writing poetry, in order to bring about new ways of thinking, experiencing and acting in relation to contemporary issues in children's rights that are grounded in epistemologies of children of the Global South. The process of group co-creation expressed in this article reflects the cyclical and iterative nature of art and research, whereby the "making" of poetry has led to a deeper "making sense of" children's rights (Kara 2015: 16). The process of co-creation sought to uphold international good practice around child participation, according to the nine basic principles for meaningful and ethical participation as set out in General Comment No 12 of the UNCRC (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009).

The article was written through a combination of online participatory workshops and individual writing activities. Between July 2023 and the end of January 2024, a total of seven online workshops were convened. In the first meeting, the scope of the special issue was discussed and the group collectively decided how they would like to respond to the call. At the end of that session, the children and young people decided that they wanted to write poetry to explore contemporary issues in children's rights. One of the co-authors set up a WhatsApp group called "Poetry for Rights" where the other participants shared ideas about their poems and eventually first drafts of their poetry, and then exchanged feedback. It was an iterative and peer-led process. After the poems were all written up, some final workshops were convened to focus on analysing the key themes of the poems as well as reflecting on the process and the implications of the methodology. Children and young people named as co-authors underwent a process of informed consent to be part of the publication, including with parental agreement.

The children and young people who co-authored this article understood poetry to be a form of artistic expression where feelings and ideas could be conveyed through a distinctive style with rhythm. They chose to express themselves through poetry because they felt that it was a way to convey emotions and complex ideas without conforming to adult-centric academic scripts. They agreed that poetry offers a condensed form of communication that can be especially accessible to children and young people. They felt that the current generation of children and young people often struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings, maybe because

of a lack of knowledge on expressing themselves or an inability to find the right words to convey their feelings. Poetry emerges as a valuable avenue of expression, utilizing words, rhythm and emotions to make young people and children feel heard. They saw poetry as an avenue for free self-expression that served as a pure manifestation of thoughts and feelings, offering an opportunity for children, particularly in the Global South, to voice their unfiltered opinions. Poetry enables young children to tell their stories untampered and uninfluenced, conveying their thoughts and pushing their own agendas. Unlike articles or papers that may face challenges or misinterpretations, poetry stands as a pure means of expression, fostering a connection between the reader and the writer and allowing personal interpretation. In the words of one of our young people “poetry transcends the debates of right or wrong, serving as an expression of personal thoughts that provides solace and comfort to both the reader and the writer”.

When it comes to discussing complex and layered topics like children’s rights, they felt that the brevity and clarity of poetry made it easier for them to express their feelings. Some felt that this process was cathartic in helping them navigate and comprehend their experiences. Additionally, they felt that poetry possesses the ability to cultivate empathy. Through imagery and evocative language, it can elicit emotional responses in readers. This fosters a sense of understanding and compassion towards the experiences of others. They felt that considering children’s rights in this way can raise awareness about children’s lived experience. They felt that the symbolic and metaphorical nature of poetry prompts readers to engage in not only thinking about, but also feeling the issues being addressed. This stimulates a comprehension of children’s rights matters urging readers to delve into these topics on a profound level.

Finally, it was very important for the children and young people that their work be accessible beyond the pages of the academic journal and be available to audiences of children and young people from the Global South, like themselves, who would not necessarily read a journal in English. The idea emerged early on for co-authors to record their poems and have these available online so that their poetry could reach wider audiences of children, young people and also non-academics.

Before reading further, we invite you to listen to the children and young people’s poetry about contemporary issues in children’s rights via this link:

Poetry for Rights!

The full text of the poems can be read in Part Two.

[C] ANALYSIS OF POEMS

The following section presents thematic analysis of various themes that emerged through group analysis of the poems. Three key themes were identified: feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and erosion of mental health in the face of the polycrisis; children and young people recognizing their agency; and building horizontal and vertical communities for intergenerational transformation.

Feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and erosion of mental health in the face of the polycrisis

Many poems paint a vivid picture of the world that the authors navigate, which elegantly elaborates on the “polycrisis” that defines the post-covid world.

*The light of a thousand corporate suns. The light of another airstrike,
another raid ...*

Not ice nor fire, the world ends in light—Dhruv

The exploration commences with Dhruv’s personal reflection on consumerism, the corporate realm, and a polarized world that begets conflict. This highlights the impact of this polarized reality, a dystopian world where people are reduced to petty labels.

Once there were the birds of heaven

In a world full of hell and torment, ...

Now the birds are foodless, shelterless, motherless, fatherless-

*Losing their families and rights, they now become the empty shells-
trembling in fear,*

Crying in despair.

Now they scream in pain, now they scream in hunger

Counting their days until they see the light of their home again ...

So they plead for their rights, crying for peace- wanting freedom ...

All the birds now cry, moan and sigh

As the world has brought a havoc upon them—Rodoshee

Rodoshee’s allegorical depiction of birds in conflict further amplifies the theme of young lives ensnared in turmoil. The metaphorical “empty shells” and the desperate plea for rights portray a stark reality where the youth are deprived of essential elements for growth, resonating with the

sentiment that “the world has brought a havoc upon them”. Samikshya’s portrayal of a shrinking space for expression emphasizes the challenges children face in aligning with societal ideals, their voices drowned amidst the growing cacophony of the world:

*The world is getting louder and louder so i am in the corner,
Where no one see me I am far from you
Can you come closer, I am scared—Samikshya*

Brian’s account adds a layer to this narrative, illustrating the stark transition from carefree childhood to incarceration, encapsulated in the lines:

*TV watching, playing with glee,
Police at the door, world descends on me.
Lost everything, to bars and jumpsuits,
Punishment on them, punishment on me.—Brian*

Amrit’s reflection on unheard voices and unfulfilled promises reinforces the overarching theme of disillusionment, encapsulated in the words:

*Their voices, precious, clear, and bold,
Their thoughts and wishes, still not at the threshold,
Promises made, but hearts in fear,
Lost in a fate, far from clear.—Amrit*

In a context of uncertainty and threats, many poems conveyed a sense of disillusionment with the *status quo*.

Siroun’s lines resonate strongly with this sentiment, capturing the erosion of trust in the system:

*The path you paved- the one I was destined to walk- cracked ...
I question your system.
I question your thoughts.
I question a world.—Siroun*

Moreover, the poems illustrate how the polycrisis results in adverse effects on the mental health of children and young people. Many verses evoke a sense of desolation, hopelessness and anxiety stemming from the relentless challenges faced by children and young people.

Januka’s rallying cry for the de-stigmatization of poor mental health warns readers that:

*Deep in the soul where sufferings reside,
Mental struggles often choose to hide.—Januka*

Dhruv's poignant lines express a yearning for dreams in a world where light seems thick and elusive, mirroring the mental turmoil faced by many:

*I light a diya, too. I walk into the leathery light.
Like moths in the streetlight, I am lost. I am hurt. When will I dream?
—Dhruv*

Purnima articulates the struggle of dreaming big in a reality filled with dissatisfaction, betrayal and the weight of societal expectations. The reference to living in a cage symbolizes the constraints imposed on the young, limiting their expression and fostering insecurity:

*Dreaming big in the dreams,
Unsatisfied in reality with some screams.
Hoping for a great friendship for real,
Although she always gets a betrayal.
Fed up with life at such a young age,
Started ignoring others and living in a cage.
Afraid of expressing herself with tons of questions in mind ...
Insecurities every moment.—Purnima*

Samikshya's poignant wish for happiness and rights without a fight encapsulates the pervasive desire for a world where mental wellbeing is not a constant battle:

*I wish I was happy and would live joyfully and would have a right
without a fight.
I never felt enough.—Samikshya*

Moreover, the pervasive feeling of powerlessness in the face of oppressive systems, climate anxiety and societal pressures further exacerbates the erosion of mental health. Brian's insight into societal pressures highlights the additional burden placed on the younger generation.

*A wrong turn, a misplaced plea,
Cuffed and labeled, my innocence plea.
From childhood to inmate, my rights erased,
A child I am, with dreams to chase.—Brian*

The verses collectively convey the emotional toll of being in conflict with justice systems and influential leaders, recognizing the draining and potentially perilous nature of such confrontations. These multifaceted challenges underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support and understanding to address the complex interplay of mental health and the tumultuous world children and young people navigate.

Children and young people recognizing their strength and agency

Following from the authors' different expressions of the trials and mental burdens linked to the precarity of existing as a young person in a world of multiple and compounding crises, the poems also give a glimpse of how children and young people come to recognize their agency and role in shaping the world. The disillusionment they experience propels them to take an active stance in reshaping their own destinies and contributing to a better future.

Brian's poem portrays a generation setting the pace, redefining their space and demanding inclusion.

*Soweto's trailblazers, setting the pace,
Under 18, redefining our space.
Taking the lead, taking the ropes,
Nothing for us, without us.—Brian*

Osish's lines emphasize the responsibility of children and youth to ignite change and catalyse the sharing of information:

*Oh (we are the one) who will ignite the fire ...
Oh we are the one who were the past, who will build the future,
who will sustain knowledge and create change.—Osish*

Jeshis envisions a dream where everyone's basic needs are met, highlighting the empathetic and social justice-oriented outlook of the younger generation:

*We minors will come up ...
A dream everyone possess, a hungry wants to eat, a homeless wants
some sleep,
an orphan wants some love, everyone wants someone to talk.—Jeshis*

Samikshya's poem underscores the commitment to champion children's rights, advocate for diversity and equality and create a more just and equal society:

We speak for you. "Children's right" matters first.

We request diverse equality equity, and a just and equal society.

*Together we will build a better world. Children's for today & tomorrow.—
Samikshya*

Rodoshee's metaphorical shift from looking up to gods and goddesses to recognizing the potential for change within themselves reinforces the empowering narrative:

So now we search for Athena and Eirene-

unaware that they live among us.

*Hence shall we come together and fight for their rights ... protect
these birds—Rodoshee*

Brian's mention of children holding a constitution in their hands emphasizes a proactive stance in reclaiming their rights and space within the system:

Swear on the book, protect the planet for us all.

Justice for the child drowning in the coast, and the one

Suffocating in the city, justice we must boast.—Brian

Purnima's depiction of a resilient young girl underscores the transformative power of personal battles, as she learns to fight against the world in her unique way. The experiences of betrayal and challenges contribute to the building of confidence and motivation, akin to playing with life as a piece of art. The poignant question, "Why can't I?", reflects the resilience that emerges from questioning and overcoming obstacles. Januka's perspective introduces the notion of normalizing feeling low as a means to break the chain of societal expectations. This pragmatic approach acknowledges the inevitability of challenging emotions and positions them as integral to personal development.

Together, these verses echo a collective determination to lead and build a better world, transcending the disillusionment experienced in the face of polycrisis. The idea of standing on one's own power emphasizes the strength derived from the self-discovery that comes through overcoming adversity. However, it is crucial to recognize that this growth narrative should not overshadow the significant mental and physical abuse that today's generation faces due to polycrisis, emphasizing the need for a

balanced perspective that addresses both resilience and the urgent need for support and change.

Building vertical and horizontal communities for transformation

Following on from the authors' journeys through hardship and resilience, the final theme that emerges from the poems is the translation of hopes for a better world into strategies to build communities for transformation at different levels.

Firstly, several of the poets are scathing in their criticism of adults in positions of power who ignore or perpetuate injustices, and this raises serious questions about the conditions under which real intergenerational partnerships may be forged.

Osish's criticism of the lack of accountability from leaders aligns with the overarching demand for change and accountability from those in power.

Follow who? Those who are hypocrite? Those who believe climate change is not real?

Those who look around just to stay in comfort? Those who unsee the consequences?—Osish

Siroun highlights how her leader's failure has left her without the hope for accountability, she seeks new beginnings outside the current system.

mr Leader, i finally see you-

you dont want me to be a star

you pave me to be a bulb that dims out; the fuel running out ...

so goodbye, Mr Leader, for i leave your world,

to start my own.—Siroun

In the face of these failures, the authors express their aspirations around alternative, horizontal communities of solidarity, often characterized by peer-to-peer support. Both in the poems themselves and in the discussions within the group about the poems, there was widespread acknowledgment that sharing negative emotions was very difficult, particularly with figures of authority such as parents. In the face of this, support amongst friends and peer groups was particularly valued.

Everybody has problems; you aren't alone.

Open up your burdened soul, don't deny.

Seek support, share burden - don't hesitate.

The mind, too, needs an understanding peer—Januka

Several of the poems explicitly appeal to collective action, such as these verses from Amrit's and Jeshis's poems:

Let's listen, let's engage, let's realize,

Child participation can't be compromised.—Amrit

We are the future,

We are the hope,

We'll create change,

today or tomorrow—Jeshis

This segment not only highlights the imperative of constructing an intergenerational community but also delves into the significance of cultivating a supportive community among peers. Januka's insightful poem emphasizes the importance of peer support, urging everyone to recognize that they are not alone in their struggles. The encouragement to open up one's burdened soul, seek support and share burdens creates a sense of community where individuals can rely on each other for understanding. The authors express a shared vision around building a world marked by hope, justice and a commitment to challenging the prevailing *status quo*.

In summary, this segment showcases the multifaceted nature of community-building. While the broader focus is on constructing an intergenerational community, the emphasis on peer support adds a layer of depth to the narrative. It reveals aspirations for communities where individuals, regardless of age, support one another, creating a network of shared experiences, understanding and encouragement.

Recap

Overall, the poems express a visceral entanglement with the profound consequences of children's disillusionment in the face of polycrisis. They highlight the unravelling mental health challenges faced by children and young people, unveiling a landscape of emotional turmoil and the burdens felt by social pressures. The poems illustrate a collective sense of loss and hopelessness, echoing the universal experiences of anxiety, dissatisfaction and powerlessness. At the same time, they convey a collective realization among children and young people that they are the architects of change. The disillusionment with existing power structures

propels them to actively redefine their space, ignite the fire of knowledge, and advocate for a more equitable and just society. This recognition of shared purpose becomes the cornerstone for the formation of communities rooted in solidarity, hope for change, and a collective vision for a better world. It is within these shared negative emotions that communities find a common ground, fostering empathy and understanding. In response to these shared struggles, diverse communities become a source of solace and support. This gives rise to a compelling narrative of resilience, unity and the formation of diverse communities. These communities emerge as a response to both the recognition of agency and the erosion of mental health experienced by the younger generation.

The intertwining of these consequences accentuates the importance of community-building as a coping mechanism and a catalyst for change. The diverse communities that emerge are not only a testament to the resilience of the younger generation but also a powerful force challenging the *status quo*. Through shared struggles, these communities amplify the voices of the disenfranchised, create a space for collective healing and demand accountability from duty bearers to take action to change the doomed *status quo*.

Reflections on process

The children and young people faced a variety of challenges and gained valuable learnings while composing and analysing poems. One significant challenge was the language barrier, with some young writers expressing that it was their first time writing poems in a non-native language. Though there was no obligation to write in a non-native language, they faced hesitation in expressing themselves in their native languages. The difficulty in translating ideas and the fear of misinterpretation while translating influenced this decision:

Sometimes non-native English speakers hesitate to write in their native languages. Because translating ideas is a hard thing to do. This happened to me so I started writing in English because it is very tough to translate and availing these services (online) is also not that easy.

Similarly, choosing a topic for a poem addressing child rights issues was challenging due to the numerous urgent issues demanding attention. Young writers faced the dilemma of potentially neglecting equally important problems if they focused on just one. Some felt it challenging to choose suitable words to make the writing decent. In the same way, they were in a dilemma about which socioeconomic group of children

to write about because they wanted the majority of children and young people to relate to their selected topic.

There are numerous child rights issues that need to be addressed. So, selecting a specific topic to write a poem in regards to child rights issues was challenging for me.

I was unable to compose/produce a decent writing despite having it in my brain.

Young writers were unsure if their poem would resonate with readers and effectively express their voice to be heard by the world. They were concerned if their words would harm anyone and felt an increased level of frustration due to such thoughts.

For a certain time, I was like words are hard to choose. I felt: Will my words harm anyone? Will my poem give the same meaning to other readers? Will it be a poem for goodness and will it express our voice that the world should hear?

Analysing the poems and the process was another challenge. One of them expressed the personal challenge of interpreting poems effectively, aiming for a clear conclusion while staying true to the original poet's thoughts.

Despite such challenges, this was an opportunity for self-discovery, with a few of them highlighting that it was the first poem they had ever written, allowing them to identify their poetic potential. The writers were able to discover and embrace their creativity that had been hidden within, helping themselves to be more thoughtful and innovative. They overcame the challenges and learned the importance of continuous effort for achieving their goals. Some used the internet to discover rhyming words and to help themselves in word selection. Some felt that art, especially in the form of poetry, serves as a highly effective means of conveying messages, where the readers can derive diverse and relevant meanings. They were able to write poems on specific themes, gaining the skill of using poetry as a powerful tool for raising awareness.

I learned to be bold enough to express my inner-self, and to take small steps to put an end to violations.

Young writers believed that this experience could mark a potential turning point in their lives as poets. The experience helped in the learning of crucial literary elements such as irony, as writers recognized and applied this technique while composing their poems.

I learned to use irony in the poem, and I was realizing this even while composing the poem.

Overall, it was a journey of growth and self-realization, which included overcoming language barriers, trying out new tools, and co-creating an advocacy piece, eventually leading to a collective journey of making meaning about children's rights together.

[D] CONCLUSIONS

This article has illustrated how poetry enables children and young people to explore children's rights in a way that allows for emotions to be expressed and empathy to be shared. Poetry offers a platform for children and young individuals to express themselves more freely and actively participate in feeling and thinking about children's rights in a more holistic and embodied manner than other traditional forms of writing.

In sum, the authors highlight the significance of co-creation with children on two levels: firstly, the poetry stands in and of itself as a substantive contribution to child rights scholarship using arts-based methodologies; secondly, the reflection about the use of creative methodologies for including children in scholarship about children's rights in a way that can move beyond disembodied "expertise" and the view from nowhere that can be profoundly Othering, particularly to children and young people from the Global South.

This article suggests that the use of creative co-creation methodologies in child rights scholarship is necessary not just because they can be more "child-friendly", but because they open up space for bringing emotions back into discussions about rights as a cornerstone of reclaiming the epistemologies of children of the Global South. This reflects what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "corozonar", which is described as a way of thinking with the heart (Santos 2018). In turn it is precisely by centring the creative forms of expression of children and young people in the Global South that scholars of children's rights in the Global North and South may start to dismantle the colonial, Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge that perpetuate the false dichotomy between mind and body, and that sanitize rights discourse by removing emotion and the weight of lived experience from the discussion. Centring children and young people's poetry and analysis in a discussion of contemporary children's rights is an intentional effort to move away from the tendencies of colonial epistemologies which:

even if they attempt to take the participants' poetic claims into account, they are likely to translate these into the neutral, objective and rational language of Global North science, which would inevitably

dispossess the participants' emerging voices of their passion, urgency, authenticity and authority (Davies & Ors 2020: 288).

In contrast, echoing Santos, this article suggests that the transformative and liberatory potential of children's rights to catalyse a more fair, equal and socially just world cannot be achieved without epistemic justice for children and young people, and that creative, arts-based methods are key to unlocking these epistemologies. Or, in the words of Santos:

Before us there are more ruins than well-defined plans. But ruins may be creative too. Starting anew means rendering creativity and interruption possible under hostile conditions that promote reproduction and repetition (Santos, 2014: 5).

By foregrounding the views, perspectives and creative practices of a group of children and young people from the Global South who have been involved in international child rights advocacy, this article has provided an avenue to explore contemporary issues in children's rights through their eyes, and is an invitation for scholars from the Global North to decentre Eurocentric paradigms in creating new knowledge about children's rights.

PART TWO: POEMS

Dhruv's poem

Light

Not ice nor fire,
the world ends in light.

The light of a thousand corporate suns.

The light of another airstrike, another raid.

Shudder! Alas, the last candle in Filastine- flickers.

A match in Sudan is snuffed, a cigarette in New York lit.

Have you seen Dubai at night? The windows are honeycombs,
oozing square warmth on ashen faces that stare from labour
camps.

The light swallows them all. The shadows of silences fall large
and strong.

Can you smile for the camera? No? Does the flash hurt your
eyes? Does your

eye dazzle when lightning strikes? When another village is
swallowed by Our storm?

When the stars in the skies lie bare in mica mines. When little
hands bear large pickaxes.

And shovels. To bury loved ones. Their futures. How many more
before nightfall? Seventy?

Hanukkah. Diwali. Christmas. Festivals of light are many. Where
are the festivals of darkness?

I light a diya, too. I walk into the leathery light. Like moths in the
streetlight, I am lost. I am hurt.

When will I dream?



Brian's poems

A Child's Anthem for Rights



Constitution in hand, an umbrella on the other
Gown for protection, boots to stand in grace.
Bang the gavel, let the trees grow tall,
Swear on the book, protect the planet for us all.

Justice for the child drowning in the coast, and the one
Suffocating in the city, justice we must boast.
Litigate to protect, etched on our bosom,
For a child's future, Now and now.

Pueris et Jurisprudencia



A wrong turn, a misplaced plea,
Cuffed and labeled, my innocence plea.
From childhood to inmate, my rights erased,
A child I am, with dreams to chase.

TV watching, playing with glee,
Police at the door, world descends on me.
Lost everything, to bars and jumpsuits,
Punishment on them, punishment on me.

Soweto's trailblazers, setting the pace,
Under 18, redefining our space.
Taking the lead, taking the ropes,
Nothing for us, without us
Our Hearts, March with hopes.



Osish's poem 

Oh (we are the one) ×2
who will ignite the fire
just to learn in the world
We become a buyer

Oh we are the one
who depends on other
those who support the destruction?
those who deteriorate the environment?
those who are called humans
With no sense of humanity

Oh we are the one
who will stop the climate change
it won't take long
we just need somebody to follow on

Follow who?
those who are hypocrite?
those who believe climate change is not real?
those who look around just to stay in comfort?
those who unsee the consequences?

Oh we are the one
who were the past
who will build the future
who will sustain Knowledge and
create change

Oh we are the one
who will change the world.



Jeshis's poem



Let's have some hope,
Let's be stronger,
Let's fight for rights,
and come together.

Together we'll create,
a new beautiful world,
where voices will be heard,
without anyone's pressure.

There'll be understanding,
there'll be faith,
there'll be lovely people,
which won't be too late.

We are the future,
We are the hope,
We'll create change,
today or tomorrow.

We minors will come up,
to fight for ourselves,
we will shine,
to fulfill our dream.

A dream everyone possess,
a hungry wants to eat,
a homeless wants some sleep,
an orphan wants some love,
everyone wants someone to
talk to.

So, Let's have some hope,
Let's spread some love,
Let's fight for ourselves,
in a new beautiful world.



Amrit's poem

***Child participation, a tale untold***

Child participation, a tale untold,
Where voices bloom, dreams are mold.

Participation, to find their space,
In shaping a world full of grace,
Participation, to Empower them,
Nurturing a globe that powers them.

Their voices, precious, clear, and bold,
Their thoughts and wishes, still not at the threshold,
Promises made, but hearts in fear,
Lost in a fate, far from clear.

It's their world too, their rightful claim,
Their voices echo, their dreams aflame,
For a future built on wisdom's guide,
Child participation stands by its side.

Let's listen, let's engage, let's realize,
Child participation can't be compromised.

Let's break the chains, shatter the bars,
Empower the young, reaching for stars,
For every child, a future bright,
Where their participation takes flight, in the morning's light.

Let's build a future, bright and free,
Where children thrive in harmony,
Their rights upheld, their dreams in flight,
In a world that champions their rights.



Januka's poem



Searching for comfort in a zone unknown?
Everybody has problems; you aren't alone.

At chapters of life, when you want to cry,
Let your tears fall, don't burden your eye.
In times of sorrow, it's okay, don't feel shy,
Open up your burdened soul, don't deny.

Sometimes loneliness might hit you hard,
You might struggle when life plays the card.
Bottling up yourself isn't the path to take,
Seek support, share burden - don't hesitate.

Deep in the soul where sufferings reside,
Mental struggles often choose to hide.
Remember, silence won't heal your pain,
Normalize feeling low and break the chain.

Just as we care for wounds, visible and clear,
The mind, too, needs an understanding peer.
At any point in life, when mental illness arise-
Early intervention is vital, you must recognize.

Come, together we can redefine our ways,
Challenge the stigma in the coming days.
Building resilience in childhood can thrive-
To better mental health outcomes later in life.



Samikshya's poem



<p>Hey world, I heard , The word “children’s right” Wait i also hear , morning shows the day , The world is getting louder and louder so i am in the corner , Where no one see me I am far from you Can you come closer, I am scared , May i get love and care As i see morning; is loved with ray of sun Oh ! sun ray I wish , i love , i wished , i cared I wish i happy and live joy and have right without fight I never felt enough Unless, i was said You are stronger unless i show the power boundary free all i want unless i raise my voice And that matters I was stronger me I was growing I stand upon my power on my own The child inside me is me</p>	<p>I am younger growing clever I behave sometime Child , you getting a dumb in difficulty me Make me grow if you see I wish care love from you Nature of affection You will definitely find stronger me definition from me The way you raise me for act and action As a result as i am child I wish for right I am child i grow younger and make you proud Invest in me One day you say you are loud Again proud. Tick tick the clock rings, i dreaming the times with rights For one not getting Food , clothes ,shelter Oh ! peace is far away I see the war World fighting for world free of violence and abuse I don’t want to hear i want peace and freedom</p>
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Dreaming the world	Strong hand to us
Far away .	Which protect me
From street to sweet home	Never cry for medicine
In loneliness; pet was my friends	Sun rays never make me feel hotter burn better warm in the cold
As the dog barks	No child be abuse ,
I choosed a path away .	Either climate be a reason
Less travelled	neither child marriage a prison
One less unless i wanted to survive	No child born to death
silence free of war .	Right to respire before expire
Twinkled the star	No any violence ,
No loud voice to hear	either; word of discrimination
children's playing in the ground	grassroots
Birds singing	Wish the word better respect me
Nature reflecting	that's "No"
Smiling , living happily	I am child first let me survive
I am a child who wished	around the world that scared me turn round
imagined world with books	While the darkness i see
sitting peacefully in the river banks	I wish to see the voice of happiness rays of happiness that hears loud and proud
I never dreamed rights to write as a poem	Have faith in us
Write to survive and fight live to life.	We speak for you.
I wish	"childrens right" matters first
In these days no one	We request diverse equality equity and a just and equal society.
None to left school	together we will build a better world
Or	children's for today & tomorrow
Far from home	
Survive to live the life	
May the child glow grow and bloom	
So better be a	
Shield to protect	



Purnima's poem



Let's start a story ...

Small hands, young brain and less experience of life,
Here comes the story of a child.

Born in the family as the eldest,
Duties and responsibilities made her strongest.

Dreaming big in the dreams,
Unsatisfied in reality with some screams.

Hoping a great friendship for real,
Although she always gets a betrayal.

Fed up with life in such a young age,
Started ignoring others and living in a cage.

Afraid of expressing herself with tons of questions in mind,
Had lots of questions about the existence of humankind.

Grew some older with some knowledge of life,
Now here comes the phase of her teenage life.

Insecurities every moment in each part of day,
Learned to fight against it in her own way.

Building confidence with tons of motivation in heart,
Playing with life as a piece of art.

Questioning herself if others can "Why can't I?"

Here comes a strong and risktaker girl with confidence in her
eye ...



Siroun's Poem

*letter to the leader*

Good morning Mr leader,
Kindly take my feedback about the
first 18 years of my life with a
pinch of salt.

Born into comfort

i was privileged!

but after 18 years of privilege, i
question:

i question your system, i question
my thoughts, i question your
world

after being taught to talk,

i was told to keep it down.

after being taught to run,

i was told to slow down.

after being told i could have the
world,

the world was reduced to 26 letter.

they said, "girl take a chance and
bet on yourself! the sky is the
limit and you are made for the
stars!"

but, alas! your system bluffed the
cards and i lost myself.

the path you paved- the one i was
destined to walk- cracked,

the fog in front of the facade of
the balanced world cleared,
now after 18 years of doubt,
i can finally see the full painting.

mr Leader, i finally see you-
you dont want me to be a star
you pave me to be a bulb that
dims out; the fuel running out.

unfortunately for you, I've caught
up and choose to point the
finger at you

the fire that you hosed down,
burns brighter than before,
cuz today,

today i made a choice,

the choice you didnt give me,
the choice to add to a plotline
that you started,

and the one that i take over
today.

so, im so sorry for your loss,
you lost a puppet in your own
game.

so goodbye, Mr Leader, for i leave
your world,

to start my own.



Rodoshee's poem

***Birds of Heaven***

Once there were the birds of heaven-
In a world full of hell and torment,
There born the birds of heaven-
They fly, they sing, some die before they get seen.
The Kings and Queens laugh in schadenfreude.
As the birds get drenched in rain and odour
Of gunpowder and phosphorus.
All the birds now cry, moan and sigh-
As the world has brought a havoc upon them,

As the bloodthirsty conquerors are thriving- shooting,
killing, enjoying
Shattering the dreams of those innocent birds- as if
they are the immortals,
as if they are animals.
The rain of fire and rocks fall upon the birds, so there
blasts the bombs-
Now the birds are foodless, shelterless, motherless,
fatherless-
Losing their families and rights, they now become the
empty shells- trembling in fear,
Crying in despair.
Now they scream in pain, now they scream in hunger-
Counting their days until they see the light of their
home again ...
So they plead for their rights, crying for peace- wanting
freedom from Momus, Perses and Ares.

Where are the Lords now?

Pretending to be deaf, enjoying the thrill!

So now we search for Athena and Eirene- unaware that
they live among us.

Hence shall we come together and fight for their rights,

Perish the conquerors and protect these birds.

Someday these birds of heaven shall get their rights,

Enjoy the tranquillity, laugh and fly.



About the authors

Kristen Hope, 38, has over 15 years' experience working in international development. Her areas of expertise include children's rights, child protection, participatory research methods and legal pluralism. Kristen has worked with children and young people from around the world who have experienced displacement, violence, discrimination and contact with justice systems, many of whom seek to leverage their lived experience to create change and claim their rights. Kristen is currently a PhD student at the University of Bath conducting research about decolonizing international child protection in the context of the climate crisis, with funding from the UKRI/ESRC.

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Dhruv Bhatt, 18, is an Environmental and Child Rights Defender working with several international organizations to highlight youth and child perspectives in policy-making and environmental action. They began climate activism at age 11, growing up in India and Nigeria, where children are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change but often lack the resources to organize campaigns for their rights. Through various advocacy projects and affiliations, Dhruv works to engage, connect and empower children in rights-based climate activism.

Januka Jamarkatel, 21, is a Child and Youth Rights Activist from Nepal, who has been working in close collaborations with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations and communities since 2015. With expertise in the field of child rights and youth empowerment, Januka is a Facilitator for Child-Friendly Local Governance. She led the Municipal Child Club Network of the Itahari sub-metropolitan as the President from 2018 to 2021.

Brian King, 18, is a passionate Child Rights Advocate based in Nairobi, Kenya. With a dedicated focus on challenging stereotypes and empowering children, he is committed to fostering their participation and amplifying their voices to address the challenges they encounter. Brian is an experienced journalist and child advisor, actively contributing to the promotion of children's rights and perspectives.

Osish Niroula, 16, is a Human Rights and Child Rights Activist from Nepal. He eagerly wants to implement technology in the field of children's rights. He started this journey when he was nine years old and works to fill the gap between children. He has worked with organizations such as Terre des Hommes, YOUNGO, Pathfinders and the Nepal Government.

Jeshis Jamarkatel, 16, is a Child Rights Activist from Nepal who has been working for the rights of children for more than six years. He is also one of many child advisors at #CovidUnder19. He began his journey through school level and is now contributing at the international level as well.

Siroun Thacker, 17, is studying in Nairobi, Kenya. She is an avid reader and writer who is an Advocate of action against climate change and the promotion of human rights. She also has a strong sense of community and a passion for community service.

Amrit Rijal, 22, is a young Child Rights Advocate from Nepal engaged in the field since 2015. He is a medical student at Kathmandu University, a research enthusiast, and also an actively advocating medical education campaigner. Amrit is a Peer Mentor at the #CovidUnder19 initiative, where he works on child rights-based research and advocacy. He is the founder of 'Lakshyadeep', which aims to empower youth and promote social entrepreneurship. He also moderates and facilitates workshops on Child-Friendly Local Governance and other child rights-based projects.

Purnima Bhattarai, 16, is a Child Activist from Nepal with six years' experience working in a child club for a child friendly environment. She is a passionate activist willing to work for the welfare of children.

Rodoshee Sarder is a 17-year-old Child Advisor of #CovidUnder19 and Child Rights Activist from Bangladesh. She is a determined teenager working for children's and human rights as well as environmental rights and thus wants to make this world safe, secure and peaceful. She wants to be a scientist contributing for the improvement of the world alongside everyone.

Samikshya Dahal, 19, is young Activist from Nepal. Along with her studies, she is active in advocating for positive changes in society. With her touching poems, she spreads messages to in-person and social media audiences. She has also been raising her voice for addressing important issues like gender-based violence, taking part in different consultations and conferences. Her motivation for being involved in activism is that she wants a fair, equal and just society.

Prathit Singh, 21, is a Youth Advocate, working for the past three years in areas of child protection, participation and justice. He is a student of International Development at the Geneva Graduate Institute, specializing in human rights and humanitarianism and has been passionately promoting meaningful child and youth participation and intergenerational partnerships between children, young people and adults.

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