

Setting the scene

The series of REJUVENATE dialogues are intended to foster debate across a community of practice working on child and youth rights.

Our first dialogue examined the principles that people take into child and youth centred research and community development.

Key issues that were highlighted from the [REJUVENATE principles](#) were the importance of relationships and the energy that young people can contribute to building new visions of the future.

Our second dialogue took place online on 12th January 2022.

The dialogue was divided into four sessions. First, a youth speaker, **Subekshya Budha Magar**, shared her experience of working as a co-researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic. After her presentation, the dialogue participants separated into break out groups where they shared their own experiences of working with children and youth through Covid-19.

After returning to plenary, youth facilitators of each breakout room shared key points from their group discussions. Lastly, two discussants, **Linda Theron** and **Hilde Deman** situated the dialogue in international research and advocacy by presenting their global perspectives.

Highlights

(You can also watch the dialogue discussion and presentations: https://youtu.be/7C9_fUvghko)

Youth researcher presenting her work with the CLARISSA programme in Nepal

Subekshya Budha Magar collected stories from other young people with the CLARISSA programme. In this dialogue she shared her experiences working as a child rights activist during the pandemic.

“Engaging in life story collection process despite all the challenges due to COVID-19, gave me senses of satisfaction and motivation.”

Later, in a group dialogue, **Subekshya** spoke about a need for more information that is child-sensitive and easy to understand. She found that adults in communities had access to information about the pandemic, but it was not filtered down to children and was not in a format accessible to children. She also said that children need to be given the space and opportunity to ask questions about world issues that impact their lives. She further emphasized a need for free education and better access to resources.

Sudhir Malla, from the CLARISSA team in Nepal, discussed the geopolitics on Nepalese borderlands, which have led to physical challenges for young people, particularly those most marginalised. Nonetheless, he stated that improved communications and digital meetings have been a positive outcome of the pandemic.

Opening issues for this dialogue

Vicky Johnson began the dialogue by drawing on her experiences of the challenges which arose while working with children and youth throughout the pandemic.

Rejuvenate Dialogue

12th January 2022

The REJUVENATE principles

- Relationships
- Evolving capacities
- Justice - personal and social
- Unusual suspects
- Visual and creative praxis
- Empowerment
- Norms – social and institutional
- Accountability
- Transformation
- Energy

Vicky drew on two projects:

- [Community-determined change-scapes of COVID Recovery](#) which comprised intergenerational community-driven research across the Highlands and Islands, supported by the Scottish Funding Council
- [Revisits to street-connected girls in Nairobi](#), an enquiry carried out by Pendekezo Letu with youth researchers, funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund



Pendekezo Letu

"What tips the balance between vulnerability and agency?" is a research report highlighting the importance of listening to marginalised children and youth. Narratives from 11 young women showed how everyday lives in street situations in Nairobi have been affected during the pandemic. Challenges included restrictions on work and education, exacerbated by living in overcrowded conditions, exposure to increasingly abusive relationships and 'covid babies'.

Vicky noted that:

- There is growing evidence of the widening inequalities that have surfaced during the pandemic.
- Researchers of all ages have had to be extremely flexible. Sometimes, for example, when creative methods have been planned, there has been a need to return to more traditional interviews on the phone.
- Accessing children and youth sometimes requires working with the key workers who support them in their every day lives. This often involved working with trusted partners and forming new partnerships in different ways, such as online and/or through social media.
- Much attention has been focused on elderly and vulnerable adults, but children and youth have also had disrupted education and working lives. Attention needs now to turn to addressing young people's mental health, increased domestic abuse, crowded conditions, and unwanted/ unplanned pregnancies.

Break out discussion groups

Koketso Dlongolo, Raisa Philip and Ramshi Crockford facilitated breakout groups. Discussion focused on participants' experiences of working with children and youth during Covid and what we could do better to include the perspectives of children and young people in the recovery from Covid.

In plenary, the youth facilitators shared key points from the discussions in their respective groups. Examples put forward showed how the pandemic has **pushed vulnerable young people into positions of responsibility and adulthood before they are ready, disrupted education, highlighted digital poverty, and worsened anxiety, mental health and domestic violence.**

Specific input from participants in the dialogue was as follows:

Dr. Ruth Edmonds, an ethnographic researcher, works in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and runs a small organisation called 'Keep Your Shoes Dirty' which works with vulnerable and marginalised young people. She is also the chair for the Consortium for [Street Children's Research Expert Forum](#). Her key takeaway from the pandemic was that there are more children in street situations and attention is needed to increase access to services for the most marginalised. She argued that we need to continue to listen to the perspectives of children connected to the streets in order to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on child and youth rights.

Evie Jusni works at Rumah Sekolah which translates to 'home/house schooling' in Indonesian. The organisation was set up during the pandemic to assist parents in home schooling while government schools were closed.

Rumah Sekolah

In Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic, children experienced significant learning loss as the result of school closure. Furthermore, health issues, reduced economic opportunity, and parents' inability to continue remote learning for children contributed negatively to children's out-of-school experiences.

For these reasons, [Rumah Sekolah](#) (house as school) was established in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Rumah Sekolah is a home-schooling collective that is open to all children regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds, physical living and working conditions or economic status. The school works closely with parents in the learning process, promoting shared responsibility for their children's education.

Laura Hughston shared her experiences of working in monitoring and evaluation at CARE International where children and young people are included in the process of evaluating the programmes in which they are involved. She argued that involving young people in programme evaluations at practitioner level creates agency and works as an enabling mechanism that can improve access to essential services.

CARE International

[CARE International](#) is one of the world's leading global aid organisations, supporting over a thousand community-based development and humanitarian aid projects around the world. Currently, CARE operates in 104 countries, directly providing aid in 89. They use a 'rights-based' approach and work primarily with women and girls within their communities to reduce inequality and catalyse positive change.

Pragya Lamsal is a Nepal-based development professional and human rights activist working with CLARISSA. She has long been involved in various research, advocacy and campaigns, especially on menstrual hygiene, right to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), disability rights, gender equality and equity as well as women's economic empowerment. Pragya highlighted the need for awareness about children's mental health during the pandemic. She found that the children her organization worked with were highly stressed: they worried about access to education, lack of technological resources to facilitate their education, and the pandemic's impact on the economy which placed additional financial pressures on their families.

Discussion points around recovery and norms highlighted the multi-faceted role of unequal access to services for young people, exacerbated by class divides, which further exclude the most vulnerable and marginalised young people from technology and education facilities. Unequal access also worsens other social issues, including mental health problems, domestic violence and gender inequalities. For example, parents struggling with financial instability may have fewer capabilities and resources available to support their children who suffer from mental health problems caused by or aggravated by the pandemic. Furthermore, the pandemic has heightened distrust towards governments, due to the questioning of government actions and decision-making around COVID-19. In our quest towards recovery, our priority should be making young people more visible in the public sphere. After feedback from the breakout discussions, Linda Theron and Hilde Deman shared their experiences of the challenges, adaptations, and opportunities of working with young people during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Linda Theron, Professor in Educational Psychology, spoke about conducting research on resilience in South Africa with children and adolescents during the pandemic.

Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments (RYSE)

[Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments \(RYSE\)](#) is a 5-year multinational research project that explores patterns of resilience among young people in changing environments. Research sites include communities involved in oil and gas production and communities impacted by climate change. This project is focused on Drayton Valley, Alberta, Canada and Secunda, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

RYSE examines the biopsychosocial resilience of young people over time and the relationships between the resilience of ecological systems where there are disruptions—some positive, some negative—related to oil and gas production and the effects of climate change. The project aims to understand how young people adapt and thrive in stressed environments.

Linda began by painting a picture of the stressful lives of youth living through the pandemic in extreme poverty and as part of migrant populations with little access to services.

She explained that there have been three challenges to resilience theory:

- Development of theory in a minority world context;
- Overemphasis of psychological ruggedness ; and
- Landmark studies that are designed by adults

The research Linda and colleagues carried out in South Africa responds to these challenges. Her presentation covered the innovative, participatory work on resilience over 4 years with over 600 youth. She emphasised the importance of young voices in design, analysis and presentation of findings.

Due to the pandemic, they had to redesign the study to limit face-to-face contact. Part of redesign included training the young people who were working with the project to be able to support other young people who became quite distressed during the calls to access telephonic mental health support services. In this way, they could signpost other young people to services.

Although it was a challenge to have the full flexibility that is needed in a situation like this and to access the most marginal, Linda insisted that **'that in COVID times as in any other challenging times, we have a moral imperative to design research and redesign research in ways that sustains that involve with the active involvement of young people, as co researchers, and as participants'**. Useful practical lessons in retaining young people in research included: making sure there were phone numbers for the trusted network around the young researchers, and using the social connections between young researchers to contact one another.

Hilde Deman from [Search for Common Ground](#) spoke about how youth distrusted the government before the Covid-19 pandemic and that the pandemic exacerbated the distrust. Youth were more likely to question government actions and decisions in reaction to the pandemic, especially with vaccine development and rollout. Moving forward into recovery and life post the pandemic, she said that we need to find ways of rebuilding trustful relationships between youth and their governments.

She explained that young people have become important on the global policy level and during the pandemic took on support roles and responsibility locally and nationally in ways which adults were not expecting and as a result shifted the ways in which adults viewed young people's roles.



Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (SfCG) is the largest dedicated peace-building organisation in the world. They are present in over 30 countries which are either in open conflict or in phases right after conflict. They have operated for over 40 years and their work focuses on promoting social cohesion at the community and societal level.

In the last 10-15 years, SfCG has investigated in putting young people in the driving seat of peace building efforts.

She gave examples in which young people helped older people with food distribution and actively collaborated with services and the police to gain trust to be able to support others. In this way, young people were able to collaborate with security forces in ways in which they hadn't previously. Hilde also raised examples of young people bridged relationships between health workers and communities in instances in which there were previously low levels of trust.

This was also the case in Ebola where government officials relied on youth to help spread messages about public health. In Uganda, younger refugees helped translate government information into local languages so older generations could understand health messages.

Research on social cohesion in the pandemic across 6 countries showed that youth have been hit extremely hard: many have lost their livelihoods through the pandemic and their mental health has suffered. What this means for social cohesion and societal resilience in the longer term is yet to be seen.

Building connections

In this dialogue we reflected on how the online dialogues had facilitated more youth participation and for speakers and participants from across global contexts to take an active part in discussions. Youth facilitators, Koketso Dlongolo, Raisa Philips and Ramshi Crockford, posed questions to the breakout groups and summarised key points from adult and youth participants in the discussions.

The format of how we interact can be more adult- or youth-focused and can encourage their inclusion. Adults are not always comfortable starting with a youth speaker, but our discussants were patient and waited until the end to share their experiences across global contexts and to pick up the important points that arose from the intergenerational dialogue.

Continuing the conversation

- **Blogs** – REJUVENATE would like to keep the conversation around child and youth rights going through regular [blogs](#). If you have an idea for a blog, please do [get in touch with one of the REJUVENATE team via our website](#).
- **Explore and submit to our [Living Archive](#)** – a collection of organisations, projects and resources all focused on child and youth rights and participation. We've included some examples in boxes in this paper. If you have an item you think others in the field can learn from, please [fill out our submission form](#).