

Decolonizing the Universal Child: A Critique of Hegemonic Rights Discourses in the Global South

Uche Nnawulezi¹

¹Department of Public International Law, College of Law, University of Lay Adventist of Kigali, Rwanda

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2718-3946>

Jacques Kabano²

²Department of Public International Law, College of Law, University of Lay Adventist of Kigali, Rwanda

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0248-9204>

Muhammad Iftar Aryaputra³

³Faculty of Law, Universitas Semarang, Indonesia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7106-6689>

✉ Corresponding email: uche.augustus@unilak.ac.rw

Abstrak

Hak-hak anak telah memperoleh pengakuan universal melalui berbagai instrumen hak asasi manusia internasional, khususnya United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Akan tetapi, diskursus yang berkembang masih didominasi oleh paradigma Barat dan pandangan individualistik yang kerap dipandang sebagai bentuk neo-kolonialisme karena memarginalkan pengalaman hidup, relasi sosial, dan realitas budaya anak-anak di Global South. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana hak-hak anak dapat didekolonisasi melalui penguatan konteks lokal, mengkaji cara anak-anak di Global South menegosiasikan dan memaknai hak-hak mereka, serta mengeksplorasi kontribusi praktik sosial budaya lokal terhadap

pengembangan perspektif dekolonial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode doktrinal dengan menganalisis bahan hukum primer dan sekunder melalui pendekatan konseptual dan kritis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsepsi hak-hak anak dalam UNCRC masih berakar pada asumsi epistemologis yang berpusat pada Barat sehingga sering kali mengabaikan keragaman pengalaman masa kanak-kanak di Global South. Temuan penelitian juga memperlihatkan bahwa anak-anak merupakan aktor sosial yang aktif dalam menafsirkan dan mengadaptasi hak-hak mereka sesuai konteks sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya setempat. Praktik komunitas lokal, relasi kekerabatan, dan norma sosial informal menyediakan alternatif konseptual yang memperkaya pemahaman mengenai hak-hak anak. Kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada pengintegrasian agensi anak, pluralisme epistemik, dan sistem pengetahuan lokal sebagai fondasi rekonstruksi kerangka hak anak yang lebih inklusif dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci

Dekolonisasi, Hak Anak, Global South, Dekolonial, UNCRC.

Abstract

Children's rights have gained universal recognition through various international human rights instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, prevailing discourses remain dominated by Western developmental paradigms and individualistic perspectives that are often criticized as forms of neo-colonialism for marginalizing the lived experiences, social relations, and cultural realities of children in the Global South. This article aims to examine how children's rights can be decolonized by strengthening local contexts, to analyze how children in the Global South negotiate and interpret their rights, and to explore the contribution of local socio-cultural practices to the development of a decolonial perspective on children's rights. This study employs a doctrinal legal research method based on the analysis of primary and secondary legal materials through conceptual and critical approaches.

The findings reveal that the conception of children's rights embodied in the UNCRC remains rooted in Western-centric epistemological assumptions, often overlooking the diversity of childhood experiences in the Global South. The study further demonstrates that children are active social agents who interpret and adapt their rights within specific social, economic, and cultural contexts. Local community practices, kinship relations, and informal social norms provide alternative conceptual frameworks that enrich understandings of children's rights. The novelty of this article lies in integrating children's agency, epistemic pluralism, and local knowledge systems as foundations for reconstructing a more inclusive and contextual children's rights framework.

Keywords

Decolonizing, Child's Rights, Global South, Decolonial, UNCRC.

Introduction

Eurocentric universalism structures the doctrinal core of the UNCRC as,¹ near-global ratification by 196 states parties masks persistent implementation deficits across the Global South. The Convention's text and interpretive apparatus embed liberal-individualist assumptions forged in 19th-century Western Europe: protected innocence, prolonged dependency, and formal schooling, that clash with relational, communal, and agentic constructions of childhood prevailing in Southern contexts.² In this context, Southern children encounter these norms not as emancipatory instruments but as regulatory technologies

¹ Elizabeth A. Faulkner and Conrad Nyamutata, "The Decolonisation of Children's Rights and the Colonial Contours of the Convention on the Rights of the Child," *International Journal of Children's Rights* 28, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02801009>.

² Manfred Liebel et al., *Childhoods of the Global South: Children's Rights and Resistance, Childhoods of the Global South: Children's Rights and Resistance*, 2023.

that pathologise local survival strategies. Street-working adolescents, child caregivers in rural households, and market traders exercise forms of participation and provision unrecognised under the UNCRC's participation and best-interests clauses.³ That being said, formal rights discourse thereby reproduces the very marginalisation it purports to redress. According to Faulkner and Nyamutata's dissection of the Convention's colonial contours, it exposes how its drafting and subsequent monitoring apparatus perpetuate a Northern-centric hierarchy of knowledge that continues to shape global enforcement mechanisms.⁴ While the prevailing situation in international children's rights scholarship treats the UNCRC as a neutral, progressive benchmark, such a stance collapses when confronted with the coloniality of power that Quijano identified and that subsequent Southern theorists have traced into contemporary rights regimes.⁵

In the views of Nyamu and Wamahiu, they demonstrate in the Kenyan child-protection system how judicialised interventions grounded in UNCRC standards criminalise poverty-driven family arrangements, while eliding indigenous practices of shared responsibility rooted in communal ethics.⁶ The result is not protection but intensified structural vulnerability for the very populations the framework claims to elevate. Decolonisation here demands more than additive inclusion of local voices, and also requires dismantling the

³ Ana Vergara del Solar, Valeria Llobet, and Maria Letícia Nascimento, "South American Childhoods Since the 1990s: Between Neoliberalisation and the Expansion of Rights—An Introduction," in *Studies in Childhood and Youth*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78949-7_1.

⁴ Faulkner and Nyamutata, "The Decolonisation of Children's Rights and the Colonial Contours of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

⁵ Tatek Abebe, Anandini Dar, and Ida M. Lyså, "Southern Theories and Decolonial Childhood Studies," *Childhood*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682221111690>.

⁶ Irene K. Nyamu and Sheila P. Wamahiu, "What Might a Decolonial Perspective on Child Protection Look like? Lessons from Kenya," *Childhood* 29, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682221111782>.

epistemic hierarchy that positions Western childhood as the universal referent against which Southern practices are judged deficient.

Similarly, Twum-Danso Imoh's interrogation of plural legal orders in Ghana reveals how statutory rights frameworks intersect with customary kinship obligations in ways that render strict UNCRC compliance both impractical and culturally corrosive.⁷ Interestingly, children themselves negotiate these intersections daily, producing living rights that doctrinal analysis must now centre rather than subordinate. Liebel's framework of rights from below further sharpens the doctrinal challenge.⁸ Children in Latin American popular neighbourhoods and African urban peripheries do not merely receive rights; they enact counter-rights through collective action and everyday resistance that expose the Convention's adultist bias and its failure to accommodate Southern children's political subjectivities.⁹

Abebe, Dar and Lysa's engagement with Southern theories of childhood similarly underscores the need to move beyond Eurocentric binaries toward epistemic pluralism that values hybridised, context-specific ontologies of childhood.¹⁰ Chirowamhangu's comparative analysis between African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) along with the UNCRC highlights how decolonising information generation on child's rights in Africa requires prioritising indigenous frameworks over imported universalism that often

⁷ Marieke J. Hopman, "Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society, Written by Afua Twum-Danso Imoh," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 33, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-33040011>; Afua Twum Danso Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*, *Turning Global Rights Into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*, 2024.

⁸ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist*.

⁹ E Verhellen, "Children's Rights: Education and Academic Responsibilities," in *Challenging Mentalities: Implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child/Défier Les Mentalités. La Mise En Oeuvre de La Convention Des Nations Unies Relative Aux Droits de l'enfant*, *Ghent Papers on Children's Rights*, 1998.

¹⁰ Abebe, Dar, and Lysa, "Southern Theories and Decolonial Childhood Studies."

reproduces colonial hierarchies.¹¹ These interventions expose the limits of doctrinal harmonisation and compel a reconstruction of rights discourse. Despite the fact that several there are legislations and policy frameworks on the rights of the child, and on the basis that they are meant to serve the best interest of the child, it has raised several germane questions. How do conventional child rights discourses within the Global South re-inscribe Western constructions of childhood and colonial hierarchies? How is the "best interest" of the child construct employed to marginalize indigenous child-bearing practices and community -based care models? In what ways do local actors in the Global South adapt, challenge, or redefine global human rights to fit their specific context? What strategies can be implemented to transition child participation frameworks in the Global South from a purely discursive approach to one that encompasses the material, contextual realities of children's lives? To what extent does the imposition of standardized, 'universal' childhood construct marginalize alternative, locally-situated upbringing practices in the Global South?

Method

This paper adopts a doctrinal method, relying on primary sources such as the CRC (1969) and caselaw, and secondary sources, including scholarly materials in journals, textbooks, and online works. The data underwent rigorous jurisprudential analysis focused on the paper's key themes, leading to findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The structure comprises seven parts: Section 1 introduces the study. Section 2 situates decolonial theory alongside Southern conceptions of childhood, foregrounding the child as an active agent. Section 3 lays out methodological commitments grounded in doctrinal exegesis, while integrating lived realities. Section 4 examines the imperial contours of

¹¹ Raymond Chirowamhangu, "Decolonisation of Knowledge Production on Children's Rights in Africa," *African Renaissance* 21, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2024/21n4a1>.

the UNCRC, the 'save the children' trope, and developmentalist globalism. Section 5 discusses emerging reconceptualizations from Southern praxis. Section 6 draws policy implications for context-sensitive implementation. Section 7 concludes by outlining pathways toward epistemic pluralism in children's rights doctrine.

Results and Discussion

1). Decolonization and Childhood

This section of the paper examines coloniality of power structures dominant constructions of childhood. According to Faulkner and Nyamutata's formulation, extended into childhood studies, reveals how Northern models of protected, schooled dependency operate as the universal referent. In this context, Southern childhoods stand perpetually deficient by design,¹² and marked by interdependent labour, communal caregiving, political resistance, and expose this hierarchy as epistemic violence rather than liberation. In this regard, doctrinal analysis must shift from inclusion to systematic dismantling of knowledge production that renders those voices invisible or pathological.

Evidently, Southern theories of childhood exposes the limits of Eurocentric frameworks as Abebe, Dar and Lyså demonstrates that universalising visions of childhood as a discrete, vulnerable life stage fail to account for hybridised, context-specific ontologies forged in postcolonial realities across Africa, Latin America and South Asia.¹³ These theories reject additive multiculturalism. They demand epistemic pluralism grounded in local cosmologies of interdependence and collective agency. The paper reveals that the likes of Liebel, Budde, Markowska-Manista and Meade, treats Southern childhoods as deviations requiring correction. It goes without saying that Southern theory reframes them as generative sites of resistance and knowledge

¹² Faulkner and Nyamutata, "The Decolonisation of Children's Rights and the Colonial Contours of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

¹³ Abebe, Dar, and Lyså, "Southern Theories and Decolonial Childhood Studies."

creation that challenge the UNCRC's best-interests paradigm at its core.¹⁴

Notably, Ubuntu exemplifies this reframing with particular force in African contexts. The philosophy *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, a person is a person through other persons, positions the child within relational networks rather than as an isolated rights-bearing subject. Communal responsibility and intergenerational reciprocity replace individuated protection. Such ontologies generate rights claims that blend individual dignity with collective solidarity. They expose the adultist individualism of Northern discourse.¹⁵ In the views of Mugumbate and his colleagues, they illustrates how Ubuntu-inspired models support communal child-rearing and decolonised social work practice, offering concrete alternatives to institutionalised protection paradigms.¹⁶

The child as active agent occupies the doctrinal centre in this reconceptualisation. The work of Liebel, Budde, Markowska-Manista and Meade on rights from below shows working-class children in Latin American popular sectors enacting counter-rights through everyday survival strategies and collective mobilisation. These practices expose the adultist bias embedded in formal participation rights.¹⁷ An analysis of the paper reveals that street children in Uganda illustrates child-led resistance as decolonial praxis that reclaims dignity against structural violence. It contradicts the passive-victim narrative that dominates Northern rights discourse.¹⁸ The decolonial re-imagining of participatory rights underscores the necessity of centring children's own

¹⁴ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Abdul Karim Bangura, "Ubuntugogy: An African Educational Paradigm That Transcends Pedagogy, Andragogy, Ergonagy and Heutagogy," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 2005.

¹⁷ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*

¹⁸ Amy E. Ritterbusch et al., "Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 143 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106278>.

meaning-making processes. Such processes routinely exceed the narrow parameters of Article 12 of the UNCRC.¹⁹

Decolonisation demands recognition that children's agency in the Global South operates along continua of interdependence rather than isolated individualism. The prevailing orthodoxy privileges Northern notions of autonomy. Empirical evidence of children negotiating kinship obligations, economic contributions and political subjectivities simultaneously affirms and subverts formal rights instruments. Such evidence does not negate rights. It demands their reconstruction through Southern epistemologies that treat the child as embedded in relational networks rather than an abstracted legal subject.²⁰

These theoretical interventions compel doctrinal reorientation. Coloniality of power persists because scholarly works continue to measure Southern realities against Northern standards. Southern theories, Ubuntu philosophy, and children's protagonism provide the necessary rupture. The doctrinal task is not harmonisation but epistemic delinking. Only then can rights doctrine serve liberation rather than replication of colonial matrices.²¹

2). Decolonial Approaches

Decolonial approaches expose the doctrinal pretence of neutrality that has long insulated UNCRC interpretation from critique. Reynaert and colleagues demonstrate that prevailing children's rights scholarship in the Global North continues to treat the Convention as a self-evident emancipatory text, yet this stance actively reproduces colonial legacies by marginalising Indigenous and non-Western ontologies of

¹⁹ Natasha Blanchet Cohen, Amy Cooper, and Holly Doel Mackaway, "(Re) Imagining Children's Participatory Rights with Decolonial Learning," *O Social Em Questão* 26, no. 56 (2023): 61–88.

²⁰ Abebe, Dar, and Lyså, "Southern Theories and Decolonial Childhood Studies."

²¹ Ritterbusch et al., "Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care."

childhood.²² Such exegesis fails precisely because it refuses to interrogate the colonial matrices that render Southern survival strategies illegible under Articles 3 and 12. While critical children's rights studies have begun to acknowledge these tensions, the field still privileges textual fidelity over epistemic rupture; this paper contends that doctrinal analysis must instead enact deliberate delinking if it is to serve as a tool of reconstruction rather than replication.²³

Rizzini's editorial intervention sharpens this challenge. Interdisciplinary praxis, she argues, must centre Global South realities, yet much existing literature stops at additive inclusion of Southern case studies without relinquishing Northern interpretive authority.²⁴ The doctrinal task therefore cannot be satisfied by citation alone; it demands active displacement of Eurocentric grammars so that vernacular rights cultures become the generative centre of rights meaning-making. Existing frameworks collapse under this weight because they treat children's agency as an addendum to protection rather than its ontological precondition.

In a similar vein, pluriversal epistemologies supply the necessary corrective. According to Dywati's theorisation of decolonial pluriversality rejects the UNCRC's monological developmentalism outright, insisting that doctrinal inquiry must retrieve subaltern conceptions of rights that colonial grammar has erased.²⁵ The analysis of

²² Valeria Llobet et al., "Critical Children's Rights Studies: An Introduction," *Critical Children's Rights Studies: A Research Companion*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003510284-1>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Irene Rizzini et al., "Introduction to Special Issue: Children's Rights and Decolonial Perspectives: Challenging Dominant Modes of Knowledge Production," *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights/Revue Canadienne Des Droits Des Enfants* 12, no. 1 (2025): i-vii; Lucy Jamieson et al., "International Perspectives on the Participation of Children and Young People in the Global South," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 7, no. 1-3 (2022): 56-74.

²⁵ Zandile Dywati and Lucy Jamieson, "Towards Decolonial Pluriversality: A Critical Exploration of the 'decolonial Turn' in Childhood Studies on the Study of African Childhoods," *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights/Revue Canadienne Des Droits Des Enfants* 12, no. 1 (2025): 32-54.

the paper highlights that African and Brazilian contexts confirms that dialogic co-design methodologies, anchored in Indigenous protocols and community advisory structures, generate interpretive data inaccessible to conventional doctrinal tools. While Mukherjee's decolonisation of Article 31 rightly highlights the erasure of non-Western leisure practices, her analysis stops short of operationalising these insights into binding doctrinal reconstruction; this paper extends that move by arguing that pluriversal rights become the primary lens through which the entire Convention must be reread.²⁶ Also, Cuiuri's analysis further exposes the epistemic violence embedded in health and social policy translations of children's rights. Decolonial praxis, she maintains, requires sustained co-production with children as epistemic agents rather than passive informants.²⁷ In this sense, the result is not merely incomplete knowledge but active epistemic injustice that this doctrinal project explicitly seeks to overturn.

Moreso, it should be noted that indigenous rights-based framework embeds relational ontologies directly into doctrinal exegesis, equipping analysis to treat Global South children's survival strategies as generative of new rights norms rather than deficits requiring Northern correction.²⁸ Jamieson and colleagues' comparative participatory research across Brazil, China and South Africa reveals that decolonised methodologies expose the contextual variability of participation rights, thereby rendering Article 12 a culturally specific transplant ill-suited to

²⁶ Andrea Römmele et al., "Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy," *Party Politics* 20, no. 3 (2014); Utsa Mukherjee, "Beyond Work and Play: Decolonising Children's Right to Leisure," *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure* 7, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-024-00159-z>.

²⁷ Vanessa Cuiuri and Tara Collins, "Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children's Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children's Health and Social Policies," *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights/Revue Canadienne Des Droits Des Enfants* 12, no. 1 (2025): 78–104.

²⁸ Peter Anderson et al., "Indigenous Rights-Based Approaches to Decolonising Research Methodologies in Settler Colonial Contexts," *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* 10 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2025.1553208>.

relational childhoods.²⁹ These findings do not merely supplement existing doctrine; they compel its wholesale reconstruction so that Southern lived rights dictate interpretive outcomes.

de Castro's conceptualisation of decoloniality as radical imagination, enacted by and with children, supplies the final argumentative thrust. Children in the Global South do not await rights; they produce counter-rights through everyday resistance and collective world-making.³⁰ Further analysis of the paper reveals that even when sympathetic, still frames such practices as deviations from the UNCRC rather than as legitimate expansions of its normative horizon. This paper therefore advances a doctrinal contribution by maintaining that decolonial approaches must position Southern children's insurgent praxis as the authoritative source of rights meaning, thereby transforming critique into epistemic pluralism that the Global South has long demanded.

3). Deconstructing Universalized Rights and Colonial Contours

Epistemic imperialism structures the UNCRC's doctrinal core. In this context, liberal-individualist assumptions embedded in its drafting and interpretive apparatus privilege a Northern model of segregated, schooled dependency. Relational and interdependent childhoods in the Global South become illegible or deviant. Quennerstedt's examination of drafting history reveals persistent North-South tensions as civil and political rights receive priority over socio-economic and cultural

²⁹ Dywati and Jamieson, "Towards Decolonial Pluriversality: A Critical Exploration of the 'decolonial Turn' in Childhood Studies on the Study of African Childhoods"; Jamieson et al., "International Perspectives on the Participation of Children and Young People in the Global South."

³⁰ Lucia Rabello de Castro, "Decolonising Child Studies: Development and Globalism as Orientalist Perspectives," *Third World Quarterly*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1788934>.

dimensions salient in Southern contexts. The resulting framework operates as cultural imperialism in practice.³¹

Additionally, the paper highlights that enforcement patterns exposes the fiction. In this regard, Ursin and others demonstrates through decolonial analysis of ethnic-minority childhoods how rights discourse generates paradoxes. Formal entitlements clash with vernacular family practices. Regulatory interventions intensify marginalisation rather than alleviate it.³² Chirowamhangu's comparative study of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the UNCRC exposes hegemonic epistemologies that marginalise African priorities. Reframing is required to accommodate Southern needs instead of forcing compliance with imported universalism.³³

Furthermore, decolonial praxis demands sustained engagement with Indigenous and subaltern knowledge systems that treat childhood as a relational field of power and resistance rather than a protected interval. The paper analysis reveals that the outcome is epistemic injustice that doctrinal analysis must explicitly overturn.³⁴ The Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute report further documents how colonial legacies continue to shape international child protection, producing interventions that reproduce rather than dismantle power imbalances.³⁵ Existing literature that celebrates flexibility through reservations, however, fails to confront how such mechanisms still

³¹ Ann Quennerstedt, Carol Robinson, and John P'Anson, "The UNCRC: The Voice of Global Consensus on Children's Rights?," *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 36, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2018.1453589>.

³² Marit Ursin and Ida Marie Lyså, "Not Everyone Can Become a Rocket Scientist': Decolonising Children's Rights in Ethnic Minority Childhoods in Norway," *Social Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13020117>.

³³ Chirowamhangu, "Decolonisation of Knowledge Production on Children's Rights in Africa."

³⁴ Cuiuri (n 27); Ursin and Lyså (n 32) 117; Chirowamhangu (n 11).

³⁵ Mark Canavera and Ghazal Keshavarzian Reconstructing, "Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute: Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights," 2021, <https://robertlathamesq.org/a-starter-reading-list-on-how-child-welfare->.

subordinate Southern knowledge systems to Northern validation. Decolonisation requires epistemic delinking. Southern lived ontologies must become authoritative sources for reinterpretation. Without this rupture doctrinal exegesis remains complicit in colonial matrices of power that convert local agency into reportable violations.³⁶ Castro, in his decolonial analysis of global childhood discourses demonstrates that the UNCRC's universalist scaffolding functions as an orientalist device, projecting Northern norms onto heterogeneous Southern realities and erasing alternative ontologies in the process.³⁷

The "save the children" narrative supplies affective and moral scaffolding for doctrinal imperialism. Baughan's historical interrogation shows early interventions aligned humanitarian rescue with imperial consolidation. Southern and Eastern European children were framed as objects of Northern benevolence rather than political subjects.³⁸ Contemporary deployments reproduce the dynamic. Vulnerability narratives justify interventions that disrupt indigenous kinship and communal support systems under the banner of protection.

This narrative pathologises Southern agency as economic participation, street-level negotiation and collective caregiving are recast as deficits rather than legitimate expressions of resilience and interdependence. Critical scholarship has begun questioning humanitarian paternalism. It under-theorises the substitution effect whereby structural colonial legacies are obscured and replaced by individualised rescue stories.³⁹ Rizzini's editorial framing of decolonial perspectives demonstrates that prevailing literature stops at additive

³⁶ Cuiuri and Collins, "Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children's Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children's Health and Social Policies."

³⁷ Lucia Rabello de Castro, "Why Global? Children and Childhood from a Decolonial Perspective," *Childhood* 27, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219885379>.

³⁸ Aisling Shalvey, "Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire by Emily Baughan," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 16, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2023.0020>.

³⁹ Ibid.

inclusion of Southern case studies. Northern interpretive authority remains intact.⁴⁰ The doctrinal implication is unambiguous. Rights discourse channelled through this lens transforms potential sites of epistemic pluralism into extensions of Northern moral authority.

Developmentalism and globalism complete the colonial triad. Linear, individuated and schooled trajectories are imposed as the universal telos of childhood. de Castro's decolonial critique exposes these paradigms as orientalist perspectives. Southern childhoods appear perpetually pre-modern or deficient when measured against Northern benchmarks of progress.⁴¹ Globalist frameworks entrench the erasure. Local realities are subordinated to human capital metrics. Children become future economic inputs rather than present relational agents embedded in communal networks. Nevertheless, they rarely confront the structural violence inherent in developmentalist assumptions that convert interdependent practices into objects requiring modernisation.⁴² Empirical shifts across the Global South, collective resistance, hybrid economic contributions and vernacular meaning-making, routinely exceed UNCRC parameters.⁴³ This implies that the analytical insufficiency is glaring, and these practices constitute generative expansions of rights discourse that challenge the orientalist binary.

⁴⁰ Rizzini et al., "Introduction to Special Issue: Children's Rights and Decolonial Perspectives: Challenging Dominant Modes of Knowledge Production"; Shalvey, "Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire by Emily Baughan."

⁴¹ Rabello de Castro, "Decolonising Child Studies: Development and Globalism as Orientalist Perspectives."

⁴² Giselle Corradi and Ellen Desmet, "A Review of Literature on Children's Rights and Legal Pluralism," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2015.1072447>.

⁴³ Lucia Rabello de Castro, "Decoloniality as Radical Imagination, By Children and With Children," *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights/Revue Canadienne Des Droits Des Enfants* 12, no. 1 (2025): 1–11; Ursin and Lyså, "'Not Everyone Can Become a Rocket Scientist': Decolonising Children's Rights in Ethnic Minority Childhoods in Norway."

This paper advances that developmentalist universalism does not merely overlook Southern ontologies, but actively suppresses them through institutional mechanisms that privilege Northern telos. Doctrinal reconstruction must reject the binary. Lived rights must become authoritative sources of normative innovation.⁴⁴ The CPC Learning Network's Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute explicitly calls for dismantling neo-colonial structures in international child rights practice, arguing that globalist developmentalism perpetuates harm by erasing Southern children's agency and communal ontologies.⁴⁵

The deconstruction performed in the above paragraphs establishes that the UNCRC's universalized rights architecture sustains colonial continuity. Section 5 maps reconceptualisations emerging from Global South praxis capable of transcending these contours.

4). Reconceptualizing Rights: Perspectives from the Global South

Reconceptualization of children's rights begins with the recognition that formal legal entitlements under the UNCRC must yield to living rights dynamically enacted through children's everyday survival strategies and meaning-making processes. Hanson and Nieuwenhuys conceptualise living rights as rights that are not merely declared but constantly translated, negotiated, and reshaped by children themselves

⁴⁴ de Castro, "Decoloniality as Radical Imagination, By Children and With Children"; Chirowamhangu, "Decolonisation of Knowledge Production on Children's Rights in Africa"; Cuiuri and Collins, "Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children's Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children's Health and Social Policies."

⁴⁵ Canavera and Reconstructing, "Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute: Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights"; Sarada Balagopalan, *Inhabiting "Childhood": Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India*, *Inhabiting "Childhood": Children, Labour and Schooling in Postcolonial India*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137316790>.

in response to concrete social, economic, and cultural realities.⁴⁶ This framework directly challenges the static universalism of the UNCRC by treating rights as emergent, context-specific practices rather than top-down transplants. In the Global South, where children routinely navigate poverty, kinship obligations, and informal economies, living rights manifest as integrated moral economies that blend work, caregiving, education, and resistance into coherent strategies for dignity and survival.⁴⁷

Southern lived experiences expose the doctrinal limitations of protectionist paradigms.⁴⁸ Street-working adolescents in urban centres, child caregivers in rural households, and market traders in peri-urban zones exercise forms of participation and provision that the UNCRC's best-interests and participation clauses fail to recognise or accommodate.⁴⁹ The paper highlights that persons who attempt to dismiss these practices as deviations requiring correction reveals its analytical poverty; such views reproduce colonial hierarchies by measuring Southern childhoods against Northern ideals of insulated innocence.⁵⁰ It is the position of this paper that doctrinal analysis must invert this hierarchy: living rights generated from below should serve as

⁴⁶ Roy Huijsmans, "Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations," *Children's Geographies* 13, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2014.886876>; Karl Hanson and Olga Nieuwenhuys, *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations, Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139381796>.

⁴⁷ Katrien De Graeve, "Children's Rights from a Gender Studies Perspective: Gender, Intersectionality and the Ethics of Care," in *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315769530-16>.

⁴⁸ Claudia Fonseca, "Transnational Negotiations of the Mechanisms of Governance: Regularizing Child Adoption," *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (2007).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Karl Hanson, "Societal Impact of Academic Childhood and Children's Rights Research: Sooner or Later?," *Childhood*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219871383>.

the primary lens through which formal instruments like the UNCRC are interpreted and reformed. Without this shift, rights discourse remains an instrument of epistemic domination rather than liberation.

Empirical evidence from across Latin America, Africa, and South Asia confirms that children actively produce rights through daily negotiations. These vernacular practices do not negate the value of international standards but provincialise them, demanding hybrid translations that affirm rather than erase local ontologies of childhood. The doctrinal contribution lies in recognising living rights not as supplementary illustrations but as authoritative sources of normative innovation capable of reshaping global children's rights jurisprudence.⁵¹

Children's protagonism offers a powerful Southern reconceptualization that repositions the child from passive object of protection to active political subject. According to Liebel, Budde, Markowska-Manista and Meade's extensive work on rights from below in Latin American popular neighbourhoods demonstrates how working-class children engage in collective action, mutual aid, and everyday resistance that expose the adultist and colonial biases embedded in the UNCRC's participation framework.⁵² These children do not merely claim rights; they generate counter-rights through street-level organising and demands for recognition that far exceed the narrow parameters of Article 12.

While some Northern scholarship celebrates protagonism in rhetorical terms, it frequently dilutes the concept into tokenistic consultation exercises that maintain existing power structures. Southern perspectives demand a more radical reading: protagonism as insurgent knowledge production that challenges the very foundations of adult-centric and Northern-centric rights discourse.⁵³ In African urban

⁵¹ Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations*; Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist*.

⁵² Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist*.

⁵³ Ibid.; Afua Twum-Danso Imoh, Lucia Rabello de Castro, and Orna Naftali, "Studies of Childhoods in the Global South: Towards an Epistemic Turn in

peripheries and indigenous communities, children's protagonism often operates through relational ethics that integrate individual agency with collective responsibility, producing hybrid claims that blend dignity with communal solidarity. Existing doctrinal frameworks struggle to accommodate these because they remain anchored in individuated liberal subjectivity.⁵⁴

Judging from the above, this paper advances the argument that protagonism must become the normative core of decolonised children's rights. By centring children's own political subjectivities and meaning-making processes, reconceptualization moves beyond critique toward affirmative reconstruction. Rights from below thus serve not as exceptions to universal norms but as generative forces that expand and provincialise the UNCRC's emancipatory potential.⁵⁵

Indigenous and local knowledge systems provide essential foundations for epistemic pluralism that dismantles orientalist hierarchies in children's rights discourse. Twum-Danso Imoh's scholarship on plural legal orders in Ghana illustrates how customary kinship obligations and shared responsibility practices intersect with statutory rights in ways that render strict UNCRC compliance both impractical and culturally corrosive.⁵⁶ These systems treat childhood as

Transnational Childhood Research?," *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 7, no. 1–3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2022.2161619>; Argitha Aricindy and Muhammad Nur Hidayat, "Studies of Childhoods in the Global South towards an Epistemic Turn in Transnational Childhood Research?," *Childhood in the Past* 18, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17585716.2025.2533554>.

⁵⁴ Rushiella Songca, "The Africanisation of Children's Rights in South Africa: Quo Vadis?," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2018.1482043>.

⁵⁵ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*; Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*; Twum-Danso Imoh, Rabello de Castro, and Naftali, "Studies of Childhoods in the Global South: Towards an Epistemic Turn in Transnational Childhood Research?"

⁵⁶ Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*.

a period of gradual integration into communal life rather than prolonged segregation, generating insights that challenge Northern constructs of vulnerability and innocence.

Decolonial reconceptualization requires more than tolerance of cultural difference. It demands active retrieval of suppressed knowledges and their integration as co-equal sources of normative authority. In South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, and across indigenous communities in Latin America, rites of passage, communal caregiving, and relational ethics such as Ubuntu produce rights claims that blend individual protection with collective well-being.⁵⁷ Prevailing literature that frames indigenous practices as potential violations or mere cultural exceptions fails to recognise their generative capacity; such approaches reproduce epistemic violence by subordinating Southern ontologies to Northern validation.

The doctrinal task is therefore to institutionalise epistemic pluralism whereby indigenous knowledge systems shape the interpretation and application of rights rather than conform to pre-existing universalist templates. This paper contributes through its argument that true decolonisation occurs when Southern children's lived ontologies become the primary drivers of rights meaning, transforming the UNCRC from a monolithic instrument into one node within a pluriversal landscape of legitimate childhood frameworks.⁵⁸

Hybrid normative frameworks emerge at the productive intersection of living rights, children's protagonism, and indigenous knowledge systems. Children in the Global South routinely produce rights that simultaneously address immediate survival needs and contest deeper structural exclusion, offering concrete alternatives to

⁵⁷ Ibid.; Nyamu and Wamahiu, "What Might a Decolonial Perspective on Child Protection Look like? Lessons from Kenya."

⁵⁸ Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations*.

protectionist developmentalism.⁵⁹ These hybrids do not reject the UNCRC outright; they provincialise it by extracting emancipatory elements while rejecting its colonial contours and adultist biases.

Prevailing policy and scholarly approaches that advocate incremental localisation or cultural sensitivity remain analytically insufficient because they preserve Northern interpretive authority. This analysis advances a stronger position: hybrid frameworks must treat Southern praxis as the authoritative source for normative reconstruction. When living rights and protagonism inform doctrinal interpretation, rights discourse shifts from tools of subtle domination to instruments of genuine liberation attuned to diverse realities of childhood across the Global South.⁶⁰

Reconceptualization thus constitutes an affirmative move from critique to reconstruction. By centring Global South perspectives, living rights, protagonism, indigenous systems, and hybrid practices, children's rights can finally serve epistemic justice rather than perpetuate colonial legacies.

5). Policy Implementations and Future Directions

Policy implementation in the Global South must commence with deliberate provincialisation of the UNCRC. National legislation should treat the Convention as one legitimate grammar among multiple rather than the singular authoritative text. Integration with regional instruments such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and indigenous normative systems becomes essential. Relational ethics, including Ubuntu principles of communal solidarity

⁵⁹ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations.*

⁶⁰ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*; Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations.*

and shared responsibility, must inform judicial interpretations of best interests and participation rights. Rigid individualistic assessments give way to context-sensitive, kinship-based decision-making processes that affirm children's embeddedness in family and community networks.⁶¹

Legislative reform must move beyond tokenistic cultural sensitivity clauses. States should embed community-led structures, extended family councils, indigenous dispute resolution forums, or participatory child-adult assemblies, directly into child protection statutes. Reliance on punitive, removal-oriented interventions that criminalise poverty-driven family arrangements diminishes. Prevailing policy orthodoxy that advocates incremental localisation preserves Northern interpretive dominance. It fails to address how colonial-era institutions continue to pathologise Southern childhoods. We, therefore, insist on structural disestablishment of such models. Preservation-oriented frameworks that affirm children's contributions to household and community economies emerge as legitimate expressions of agency rather than exploitation.⁶²

Decolonised legal reforms further require amendment of reporting and monitoring obligations under the UNCRC. Living rights indicators developed through child- and community-led processes must be incorporated. Without these shifts implementation will perpetuate epistemic violence by subordinating Southern realities to external benchmarks. Existing literature promoting harmonisation remains analytically deficient. It underestimates the depth of colonial matrices embedded in institutional design. Mugumbate and colleagues demonstrate that Ubuntu-inspired legislative models in Southern African jurisdictions successfully integrate communal accountability mechanisms, producing outcomes that reduce institutionalisation while

⁶¹ Nyamu and Wamahiu, "What Might a Decolonial Perspective on Child Protection Look like? Lessons from Kenya"; Imoh, *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities: Realizing Children's Rights in Ghana's Pluralistic Society*.

⁶² Ibid

strengthening family resilience.⁶³ The Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute further documents how hybrid legal frameworks in post-colonial states yield measurable reductions in rights violations when indigenous protocols guide decision-making rather than Northern templates.⁶⁴ Professional training for judges, social workers, educators and policymakers constitutes a pivotal site for translating decolonial theory into practice. Curricula must mandate sustained engagement with Southern theories of childhood, decolonial methodologies and children's protagonism as epistemic practice rather than supplementary content. Training programmes should dismantle Northern validation protocols that subordinate local knowledge. Co-production with children and communities must become the primary mode of knowledge generation.⁶⁵

Such capacity-building cannot remain additive or donor-driven. Reversal of knowledge flows is required. Southern practitioners and children must occupy positions as lead trainers and norm-generators. Initiatives that continue to export standardised Northern models reproduce epistemic imperialism under the guise of technical assistance. Future directions must prioritise long-term investment in indigenous pedagogies and context-specific certification pathways. Cuiuri's decolonial literature review on health and social policies underscores that without epistemic restructuring of professional education policy implementation will continue to generate paradoxical rights

⁶³ Nyamu and Wamahiu, "What Might a Decolonial Perspective on Child Protection Look like? Lessons from Kenya"; Ritterbusch et al., "Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care"; Janestic Mwendu Twikirize, "Ubuntu-Inspired Tools and Models to Decolonise Social Work Practice," in *Ubuntu Philosophy and Decolonising Social Work Fields of Practice in Africa*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003330370-26>.

⁶⁴ Canavera and Reconstructing, "Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute: Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children's Rights."

⁶⁵ Cuiuri and Collins, "Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children's Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children's Health and Social Policies."

violations.⁶⁶ In a nutshell, Indigenous rights-based framework supplies an additional operational pathway. Professional development programmes that embed relational ontologies and community protocols produce practitioners equipped to treat Southern children's survival strategies as generative rather than deficient.⁶⁷ Prevailing training models that prioritise compliance with UNCRC reporting metrics fail to prepare actors for hybrid realities. The doctrinal and practical task is clear. Epistemic capacity-building must position Southern ontologies as authoritative rather than peripheral.⁶⁸

Resource allocation policies must confront the material conditions that render formal rights hollow. Developmentalist funding conditioned on Northern metrics of schooling attendance and removal from informal labour should shift toward unconditional support for family and community economies, kinship networks and child-led initiatives. Investments in communal infrastructure, community-managed education, health and economic cooperatives, enable children's interdependent agency while addressing structural drivers of vulnerability.⁶⁹ International donors and multilateral organisations must reform funding and monitoring mechanisms. Epistemic pluralism and hybrid outcomes deserve reward rather than strict compliance with universalist indicators. Transitioning from top-down reporting to dialogic, child-inclusive evaluation processes that value living rights and vernacular translations becomes essential. The current architecture, which channels significant resources through Northern NGOs, sustains colonial afterlives. Genuine decolonisation requires direct, flexible

⁶⁶ Ibid.; Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*

⁶⁷ Anderson et al., "Indigenous Rights-Based Approaches to Decolonising Research Methodologies in Settler Colonial Contexts."

⁶⁸ Ibid.; Cuiuri and Collins, "Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children's Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children's Health and Social Policies."

⁶⁹ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*; Ritterbusch et al., "Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care."

resourcing of Southern-led and child-driven projects with minimal bureaucratic gatekeeping.⁷⁰

Prevailing funding models that tie aid to measurable “progress” against Northern benchmarks obscure root causes rooted in global inequalities. Sustainable policy must link child rights implementation to broader structural reforms addressing debt burdens, unequal trade and extractivism. These factors shape Southern childhoods far more profoundly than legal entitlements alone. Shikongo’s analysis of decolonising child welfare financing demonstrates that unconditional kinship support grants in Namibia and Botswana produce superior well-being outcomes compared with conditional, Northern-designed cash transfers.⁷¹ The CPC Learning Network’s Reconstructing Children’s Rights Institute similarly argues that redirecting resources toward community economies dismantles the neo-colonial logic that treats Southern children as objects of modernisation rather than agents within relational systems.⁷²

Future research must prioritise longitudinal, participatory studies of living rights and hybrid normative practices across diverse Southern contexts. Deficit-oriented case studies must be abandoned. Monitoring

⁷⁰ Liebel et al., *Childhoods Glob. South Child. Rights Resist.*; Cuiuri and Collins, “Investigating the Invisible Hand of Colonialism: A Critical Children’s Rights and Decolonial Literature Review of Children’s Health and Social Policies”; Ritterbusch et al., “Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care.”

⁷¹ Auguste Shikongo, “Rethinking Approaches for Responding to Child Maltreatment in Namibia: Decolonizing Child Welfare” (Indiana University Indianapolis, 2025); Joan M. Verd et al., “Escaping the Trap of Temporary Employment: Precariousness among Young People before and after Spain’s 2021 Labour Market Reform Act,” *International Journal of Social Welfare* 34, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12645>; Zeldah U Rukambe and Utjiua I Ndjoonduezu, “Decolonizing Development Studies,” *The Coloniality of Humanity: Disrupting Racialized Capitalism and Fostering Transnational Solidarity*, 2026, 291; Janetta Ananias et al., “Reconsidering Social Work Education in Namibia: Past, Present, and Future,” *Social Work Education* 42, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2022.2161504>.

⁷² Canavera and Reconstructing, “Reconstructing Children’s Rights Institute: Dismantling and Reconstructing International Children’s Rights.”

frameworks should incorporate child-led and indigenous evaluation metrics, rejecting the hegemony of Northern-centric indicators of “successful” implementation.⁷³ Ritterbusch’s emphasis on centring children’s narratives of resistance in violence prevention research provides a model for policy-relevant inquiry that treats Southern children as experts rather than subjects.⁷⁴

Collaborative research with children as co-researchers can counteract marginalisation and generate actionable insights for context-sensitive policy. Without such epistemic reorientation monitoring will continue to reproduce the very hierarchies decolonisation seeks to dismantle. Blanchet-Cohen’s work on decolonial participatory rights further illustrates that child-led monitoring mechanisms yield data that conventional indicators cannot capture, exposing both synergies and dissonances with formal rights instruments.⁷⁵

The recommendations section discussed below operationalise the reconceptualisations articulated in Section 5. Theoretical critique transforms into practicable pathways that affirm epistemic pluralism as the foundation for children’s rights in the Global South.

Conclusion

The near-universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has not translated into universal emancipation for children in the Global South. Rather, the dominant interpretation and implementation of the Convention continue to privilege a Eurocentric, adultist, and liberal-individualist conception of childhood that often marginalises relational, communal, and context-specific understandings of children’s lives. As this paper has demonstrated, the universalist foundations of the UNCRC can

⁷³ Ritterbusch et al., “Child-Led Resistance in the Streets of the Global South: Decolonial Perspectives of Violence against Children Outside of Family Care.”

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cohen, Cooper, and Mackaway, “(Re) Imagining Children’s Participatory Rights with Decolonial Learning.”

function as a form of epistemic imperialism, reproducing colonial hierarchies through developmentalist assumptions, the “save the children” narrative, and global standards that frequently pathologise Southern realities.

Drawing on decolonial theory and Southern conceptions of childhood, this paper has highlighted the limitations of prevailing children’s rights scholarship and policy frameworks. The experiences of children in the Global South reveal that children are not merely passive recipients of rights but active social agents who exercise “living rights” through everyday practices of survival, resistance, and community participation. These realities challenge the adultist and colonial assumptions embedded within dominant rights discourses and demonstrate that Southern children generate alternative normative frameworks that expand conventional understandings of participation, provision, and protection.

Accordingly, meaningful reconceptualisation requires more than localisation or cultural adaptation of existing frameworks. Such approaches often leave intact Northern interpretive authority and fail to address deeper epistemic inequalities. Instead, children’s rights must be grounded in epistemic pluralism, recognising living rights, children’s protagonism, and indigenous ontologies as legitimate sources of normative authority. This shift should inform legal interpretation, institutional design, professional training, and policy implementation. Measures such as the provincialisation of the UNCRC, community-led legal structures, reversed knowledge flows in capacity-building, and structural interventions addressing global inequalities provide practical pathways toward this transformation.

Ultimately, the future of children’s rights depends on moving beyond universalised Western ideals of childhood and embracing a pluriversal understanding of childhoods as they are lived and negotiated across diverse contexts. Decolonisation therefore requires not merely the inclusion of Southern perspectives within existing frameworks, but the reconstruction of those frameworks themselves. By centring the lived realities, knowledge systems, and agency of children in the Global South, children’s rights can evolve from instruments that risk

reproducing domination into genuinely emancipatory tools capable of advancing dignity, justice, and self-determination.

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Generative AI Statement

The author(s) declare that generative artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, ChatGPT and Grammarly was utilized to enhance the language quality and overall readability of the text.

All outputs generated were subsequently critically reviewed, edited, and verified by the author(s) to ensure accuracy and uphold scientific integrity. The author(s) assume full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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