UCAC
Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale

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# Concept Note

# International Conference

## The Role of the University in the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child

## Yaoundé, Cameroon – 19–20 November 2025

## Theme: *"Advancing Child Rights through Academia: Towards new partnerships for research, training, and advocacy"*

## 1. Background and Rationale

In 2024, UNICEF Cameroon launched an innovative initiative to institutionalize child rights in higher education through the creation of **Child Rights Centres (CRCs)** in partnership with public and private universities and leading institutes. These centres are operational at the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), the University of Bertoua, the University of Dschang, the University of Yaoundé 1 and the University of Yaoundé 2-Soa. They are interdisciplinary hubs dedicated to research, training and advocacy. These centres are catalysts for academic and student engagement in building a more just and inclusive future for all children, especially those living in surrounding communities.

The vision is to embed child rights across all academic disciplines and to generate context-specific evidence that informs public policy. Beyond universities, CRCs also strengthen local governance systems by equipping municipal leaders and administrators with tools to design and implement child-responsive policies.

This effort is inspired by successful experiences from Georgia and Greece, but firmly grounded in African traditions of human rights, such as the **Charter of Manden (1236)**—recognized by UNESCO as a landmark in the history of universal human rights. Building on this legacy and aligned with global and regional instruments such as the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** and the **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)**, the initiative positions universities as drivers of social change and champions of children's rights.

Today, the integration of child rights into higher education remains partial and fragmented as well as the contribution of universities to public policy formulation and to the social debate. It is urgent to reposition universities as central actors in promoting and protecting children's rights, not only as sites of knowledge production but also as engines of social transformation.

Against this backdrop, UNICEF Cameroon and the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), in collaboration with the national network of Child Rights Centres, are convening an **International Conference on 19–20 November 2025 in Yaoundé** to reframe and amplify the role of universities in advancing child rights.

## 2. Purpose

The conference will reposition the academic discourse on child rights by:

- Drawing on Africa's cultural and historical contributions to human rights;
- Showcasing how universities can translate these values into innovative teaching, research, and community engagement;
- Building new cross-sectoral and inter-university partnerships to institutionalize child rights in higher education.

It will serve as a platform for dialogue between academia, policymakers, civil society, religious leaders, international partners, and young people—strengthening collective action to embed child rights in both education systems and public policy.

## 3. Main Objectives

**The conference aims to:**

- Highlight Africa's historical, cultural, and philosophical heritage in human rights as the foundation for a contextualized and relevant approach to child rights.
- Demonstrate the strategic role of academia in promoting and protecting child rights by systematically integrating them into teaching, research, and advocacy, positioning universities as catalysts of social transformation.
- Share experiences and good practices from Child Rights Centres in Cameroon and other international initiatives, emphasizing their three pillars:
    - Advocacy and promotion of child rights;
    - Knowledge production based on evidence;
    - Integration and teaching of child rights in university curricula.
- Establish a sustainable academic network around Child Rights Centres, fostering inter-university and South–South collaboration, as well as the sharing of innovative pedagogical and scientific practices.
- Build bridges between academia, public decision-makers, communities, the private sector, and international partners to embed child rights advocacy in multisectoral and inclusive dynamics.
- Produce a scientific and practical body of work on child rights, mobilizing interdisciplinary research, case studies, and innovative experiences to inform evidence-based policymaking.
- Strengthen academic and institutional networks and partnerships to expand the reach of research, teaching, and advocacy for child rights, while engaging and empowering younger generations in active citizenship.

## 4. Conference Themes

The conference will welcome interdisciplinary contributions (law, political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, childhood studies, health sciences, economics, communication, philosophy, humanities, and social work) around the following themes:

1. **Child Rights: Historical, cultural, and religious heritage facing contemporary challenges**
   Examining the contributions of African traditions, religious, and customary authorities to consolidating child rights, in dialogue with current practices and international legal frameworks.
2. **Universities, Academies, and Innovation: Catalysts for Institutionalizing Child Rights**
   Exploring academic, pedagogical, and technological contributions to embedding child rights in higher education, research, and advocacy.
3. **Child Rights Centres: models and innovative practices**
   Presenting experiences, achievements, and prospects of Child Rights Centres as platforms for research, training, and community engagement.
4. **University research and public policy development**
   Reflecting on how scientific knowledge production informs the design, implementation, and evaluation of child-focused public policies.
5. **Planning and budgeting for children's rights: advancing fair and sustainable public governance**
   This initiative deepens the reflection on financing and public governance mechanisms for children in Africa, with the aim of identifying key challenges, showcasing good practices, and highlighting opportunities for systemic improvement. It offers a unique platform for dialogue among academic, institutional, and community stakeholders around a central question: how can African States plan and allocate resources more efficiently and equitably to ensure the full realization of children's rights?
6. **Universities and youth participation: towards active citizenship and inclusive governance**
   analyzing the role of academic institutions in fostering citizenship education, promoting youth leadership, and ensuring their effective participation in university, local, and national decision-making processes.
7. **Child Rights, decentralization, and local governance**
   Examining approaches and practices for integrating child rights into decentralization policies and municipal management, with emphasis on institutional innovation and participatory governance.
8. **Universities, partnerships, and multisectoral dynamics**
   Exploring synergies between academia, public authorities, communities, the private sector, and international partners to strengthen collective for child rights.

## 5. Expected Outcomes

- A shared understanding and renewed commitment on the role of academia in promoting child rights.
- The creation or consolidation of a collaborative university network focused on child rights.
- The production of a digital repository compiling scientific articles, case studies, and good practices.

- Concrete recommendations for institutionalizing child rights in higher education.
- Enhanced visibility of the Child Rights Centre model as an innovative and sustainable practice.

## 6. Participants

The conference will bring together:

- Academics, researchers, and students from all disciplines;
- Representatives of Child Rights Centres;
- Rectors, deans, and academic leaders;
- Government officials and policymakers;
- Child rights experts and practitioners;
- Representatives of civil society organizations, the private sector, and media;
- UN system actors and international partners;
- Young leaders and engaged children.

## 7. Format and Methodology

The conference will adopt a hybrid format (in-person and virtual) to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. The program will include:

- Opening speeches and plenary sessions;
- Thematic workshops and interdisciplinary roundtables;
- Academic paper presentations reviewed by the Scientific Committee;
- Sessions led by young researchers;
- Master classes and practical workshops;
- Poster exhibitions and institutional showcases;
- Networking and cooperation spaces.

Conference proceedings will be published and disseminated online (including video recordings and written transcripts), providing a lasting resource for research and pedagogy.

## 8. Working Languages

The conference will be held in French and English, with simultaneous interpretation to ensure effective international participation.

## 9. Logistics and Support

UNICEF Cameroon will cover transportation, accommodation, and meals for invited speakers. Other participants will cover their own expenses.

## 10. Registration Modalities

Participation in the International Conference on the Role of Universities in the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights will be subject to prior registration.

An online registration form will be available from **1 September 2025** on the following link:
👉 https://ucac-icy.net/unicef-ucac-conference-child-rights-africa-2025/

Registrations will close on **30 October 2025**, subject to availability of places.

Participation is free of charge and primarily reserved for representatives of universities, public institutions, civil society organizations, international agencies, and youth networks. Participants will receive an official confirmation by email, along with relevant logistical information.

Badges will be distributed on **19 November 2025** at the campus of the Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaoundé.