

Experts of Their Own Realities:

Join our New Working Group on Advancing Children and Youth Rights!

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Over the past decade, children and youth rights have gained increased recognition within the human rights grantmaking community. This has been spurred in part by the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and their focus on the rights of children.

To build on this momentum, members of the International Human Rights Funders Group have created the Children and Youth Working Group to establish a space for funders to share information, collaborate, and delve into issues and strategies related to funding in this area. The Working Group aims to enhance the conversation around funding for the rights of children and youth, which, according to a 2013 evaluation by the Foundation Center and IHRFG, comprised 14% of grant dollars and 16% of grants disseminated in 2010 (by 703 foundations in 23 countries).¹ Our Working Group will seek to address a gap in the recognition of children and youth rights as a major human rights issue area. We also plan to enhance opportunities for children and youth activists to work in partnership with grantmakers to develop programming strategies for children and youth rights.



Children and youth rights are an integral component of human rights. Yet they continue to be seen as secondary or, in some instances, separate from other core human rights. Even with the 1989 ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognized the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights of children aged zero to eighteen, over 500 million children are still affected by violence worldwide;² 70 million women and girls have experienced female genital cutting; and 58 million children do not attend primary school.³

Why are children and youth rights still under-addressed? Many governments believe that, though children should be taken care of and protected, it is parents and guardians who should exercise rights in the name of their children. This thinking, however, fails to acknowledge that many children are abused by the very individuals responsible for their care. The fact that children are not adults and may possess lower social status or legal standing within their communities, in some instances, leads to unfair treatment and their absence from decision-making. An example is the pervasive use of corporal punishment in communities where an adult would be prosecuted for assault if another adult was the victim.

¹ http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/humanrights2013_highlights.pdf

² http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html

³ 2010 UNICEF State of the World's Children report, UNESCO: "Progress in Getting All Children to School Stalls" June 2014

Today many international initiatives supported by members of IHRFG focus specifically on children and youth rights, including child survival, basic education, violence in and around schools, child labor, children in armed conflict, HIV-AIDS, and gender-based violence. But this funding for children and youth rights is considered a separate issue area and is only reported as human rights funding for a population group, not as a part of the fabric of mainstream human rights strategy and tactics. Children and youth intersect many other areas of rights-based funding, including gender orientation, sexual and reproductive rights, labor rights, refugee rights, disability rights, and, more broadly, the advancement of economic, social, and cultural rights as legitimate as civil and political rights.

It is clear that states must respect and protect children's and youth rights, but beyond that, children and youth must not just be made aware of their rights. They should be encouraged to actively claim and shape these rights. In order for funders to achieve their goals, youth should not only be defined as beneficiaries, but should be recognized for the unique skills, insights, and access to communities they can bring to the design and implementation of a program.

Human rights funders traditionally aim to give a voice to the voiceless and to put those who benefit from our support at the center of our decision-making. But the lack of youth presence in human rights grantmaking, both as grantees and as decision-makers themselves in the grant process, contradicts how we as human rights funders claim we work. We must not only recognize that children's and youth rights are human rights, but we must also engage children and youth as experts of their own realities.

For more information, or to join the Working Group, please contact [Judith Lê](#).