Caribbean Child Research Conference

Researching the Caribbean Child

By Pat Ganase
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For the past 12 years, the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) has hosted the Annual Caribbean Child Research Conference in Jamaica. This year, the 13th conference is being hosted at The UWI St Augustine, Trinidad, on November 15-16. Previous Chair of the Conference, Professor Aldrie Henry-Lee, and current Chair, Dr Godfrey St Bernard, here share some insights.

Professor Aldrie Henry-Lee is the newly appointed Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies at The UWI (Mona Campus). She also serves as overall University Director of the regional institute. She is a teacher by vocation and here shares some of the reasons for the continuing work of the conference:

“Our research shows that throughout the Caribbean, there is inadequate adherence to Children’s Rights. Children are at risk everywhere. There are groups of children who are particularly vulnerable; children with disabilities, street and working children; children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS; children living in poverty; children living in the rural areas; children living in violent circumstances; those who are deprived of familial care and those who come in conflict with the law.

“Of concern is the violence meted out to children in private and public spaces. There are large numbers of children who are abused in the home, school, church and the community, every day.

“Our research also reveals that there is limited adherence to child participation rights and children’s opinions are not always sought in the formulation of policies that affect them. If they are given an opportunity to express their opinions, their suggestions are not always implemented, even if they may be relevant and necessary. We have not yet recognised the importance and benefits of social investment in children, especially if we want to ensure that the rights of children everywhere are protected and that we leave no child behind in the fulfillment of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

Dr Godfrey St Bernard is a Senior Fellow at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. A statistician by profession, his interests include problems arising from population and development, evaluation research and social policy. His focus on youth and development arises from his work on Caribbean population policy and the measurement of social phenomena. As Chairperson of this year’s conference, Dr St Bernard anticipates a packed schedule for the two days. The Opening Ceremony will be followed by the presentation of 56 adult papers and ten child papers. Below, Dr Godfrey St Bernard answers some questions about the conference.

What is this year’s Child Research Conference about?

The UWI is participating in a major project entitled “Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP) Project”, led by Dr St Bernard. This project is supporting research across eight countries in the Caribbean, Central America and North America. Teams of researchers from universities in Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are actively involved in research initiatives over the period 2016-2022. Many of the RCYP researchers will make presentations from their research at the Child Research Conference.

Other adult presentations have emerged out of research conducted by faculty members and graduate students in SALISES (within the Social Policy Cluster and the Cluster for Population and Sustainable Development), and other departments from The UWI’s three physical campuses of Mona, Cave Hill and St Augustine. Presentations will also be delivered by researchers from The University of T&T and the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business.

Issues to be discussed will include:

- Health, Education and Disability: Implication for Children’s Wellbeing
- Community Engagement and Child Protection Agendas
- Global Declarations and the Promotion of Child Rights in the Western Hemisphere
- Representations of Childhood Experience and Encounters
- Violence against Adolescents/Children
- Migration and Its Impact on Children
- Data Management Systems, Development Indicators and Demographics: Implications for Child Policy
- Parenting and Children’s Outcomes
- Global Lessons and the Education of Children and Youth in the Caribbean and Elsewhere
- Child Protection Systems in the Caribbean and Latin America: Experiential Accounts and Challenges
- Incarceration and Its Impact on Children
- Understanding Challenges and Interventions that Hinder or Promote Children’s Rights and Wellbeing
- Education Practices


How does the conference facilitate meaningful participation by children?

The conference has always involved children. This year, principals of Caribbean schools were invited to send school teams (one teacher and four students) to witness the conference and participate from the audience. In addition, ten children will deliver presentations, which will be eligible for awards.

Fifteen secondary school students from T&T and Jamaica will chair the 14 adult panels and a Plenary Session of public sector professionals. A child will also introduce the President of the Republic of T&T who is giving the keynote address.

Rapporteurs have been assigned to document and submit written reports of conference proceedings. These reports will also document responses of children to papers, which will be considered in the preparation of policy briefs for government officials and policymakers.

We are also grateful for the offers by agencies in the public sector who have pledged internships for children on the basis of their participation in the conference.

How are the findings made available to the wider society?

This conference will provide participants and stakeholder groups with research and information that is up-to-date for issues of children’s rights and wellbeing in Caribbean societies. Some of the research draws on experiences in Canada, Central America and elsewhere to bring different experiences for addressing challenges that are faced in the Caribbean. The conference facilitates the generation of knowledge from 56 adult-paper presentations and 10 child-paper presentations.

The conference fosters the establishment of a website that will host the conference presentations, many of which are likely to be works in progress. This will be a primary means of exposing research findings to secondary and tertiary-level students, as well as public sector professionals and policymakers. Rapporteurs’ notes will be transformed into policy briefs for policymakers in the Caribbean region. The conference will be videotaped and recordings will be placed on the SALISES website.

For more information:
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