UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

25 YEARS CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE
Advancing children's rights since 2001

# Programme outline | Children's Futures: A Critical Dialogue

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The UCT Children's Institute is convening a **critical dialogue** on **children's futures** on 25 – 26 November 2026.

The dialogue is a key opportunity to bridge research, policy and practice. It will address persistent and emerging challenges that compromise children's health and optimal development – ranging from rising inequality to digital harm and climate vulnerability.

We are bringing together local and global experts – including academics, policymakers, programme managers, and civil society members – to deepen collective understanding, foster collaboration, and stimulate future-oriented and evidence-based discussions on children's futures.

Over the two days there are four plenary sessions and ten carefully curated parallel sessions.

## Day 1

### Plenary discussions:

**Children's futures: Five lessons on scale, care and complexity**

- Prof Mark Tomlinson | Co-Director: Institute for Life Course Health Research, Stellenbosch University

**Demographic transitions and persistent challenges**

- Diego Iturralde | Chief Director: Demography and Population, Statistics SA

**From risk to resilience: Putting children at the centre of our response to climate change**

- Dr Christopher Jack | Deputy Director: Climate Systems Analysis Group, UCT
- Dr Darshnika Lakoo | Research Clinician, Planetary Health, University of Witwatersrand
- Michelle Sithole | Senior Associate, Centre for Environmental Rights
- Sibusiso Mazomba | Advocacy Officer, Africa Climate Alliance

### Parallel sessions:

1. Addressing the accountability gap: Strengthening health governance for better child and adolescent outcomes
2. Preventing violence against children in and through communities and health systems
3. Planning for children in a time of demographic change
4. Protecting children from harmful business practices: Centring children in efforts to address the commercial determinants of health
5. Food security and nutrition
6. Connecting research to action: Improving the mental health of children and adolescents
7. Persistent poverty and the future of social protection for children

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## Day 2

### Plenary discussions:

**The future of children's rights**

- Prof Benyam Dawit Mezmur | Dullah Omar Institute, University of Western Cape; UN Committee on Rights of the Child
- Prof Robert Doya Nanima | Law Faculty, University of Western Cape; African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Prof Tara Collins | School of Child and Youth Care, Toronto Metropolitan University; Project Director: International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership
- Prof Afua Twum-Danso Imoh | School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

**AI, digital technologies and the future of South Africa's children**

- Prof Bruce Bassett | Capitec Chair of Applied Artificial Intelligence, Stellenbosch University; Distinguished Professor of Computer Science, University of Witwatersrand
- Prof Jonathan Shock | Director: UCT AI Initiative
- Dr Zaynab Essack | Research Director: Public Health, Societies and Belonging, Human Sciences Research Council

### Parallel sessions:

8. Preventing violence against children and adolescents in and through schools: Safer futures
9. Systems of support for pregnant women and young children
10. Digital transformation of government services with children's best interests at the centre

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*Kindly note that there may be amendments to the programme. The details of parallel session panellists, as well as session times, will follow soon.