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The Fifth World Congress on Resilience

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The Fifth World Congress on Resilience, held May 26 to 28, 2021, at the Yaoundé Convention Centre (Cameroon), was devoted to “Human development, sustainable development, and resilience.” Co-chaired by Étienne Kimessoukié-Omolomo and Colette Jourdan-Ionescu, the Congress was organized by the School of Health Sciences of the Catholic University of Central Africa under the aegis of Resilio, the International Association for promotion and dissemination of research on resilience. Due to health restrictions, the Congress was held in a hybrid format, online and with 120 in-person participants.

The Congress program included seven plenary lectures, five round tables, five symposia, 34 parallel communications sessions, and three poster sessions. In total, 230 papers were presented. The authors were researchers and practitioners from 28 countries, including 15 African countries (i.e., South Africa, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, and Togo). This strong African presence shows the growing interest of this continent’s countries in resilience research and resilience-based practices.

The Yaoundé Congress followed four previous world congresses, which had topics: “From research to practice” (Paris/France, 2012), “From person to society” (Timisoara/Romania, 2014), “Resilience and culture. Culture of resilience” (Trois-Rivières/Canada, 2016), and “Resilience-based practices” (Marseille/France, 2018). The topic of the fifth Congress was chosen by considering the current strong disturbances in ecosystems balances and the growing concerns about the development and future of our planet. In addition, the pandemic caused by Sars-CoV-2 has shown the limits of current developments and, in particular, of globalization. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals formulated in 2015 by the United Nations’ member states form the core of a real action plan for the future of humanity. For putting this plan into practice, resilience has been viewed as a central concept that provides explanations for ecological and societal phenomena; at the same time, it offers avenues for intervention strategies. As research on resilience – especially on psychological resilience – had strong links with human development throughout its history, the organizers of the Yaoundé Congress have placed human development at the center of this scientific meeting, as well as sustainable development and their relationship to resilience. This framework was materialized in the content of the Yaoundé Congress program by:

- Conferences on “The role of resilience in the pathway to territorial sustainability” (Voiron-Canicio, 2021) and on “Globalization and resilience” (Ionescu, 2021);
- Round tables devoted to the relationship of sustainable development with ecology, resilience, and culture or with organizational resilience;

- Several communications devoted to issues such as “Endogenous knowledge and local development in Benin: Resilience strategies of traditional institutions in the process of sustainable human development” (Yolou Bamisso, & Ouassa Kouaro, 2021); “Savings and health microcredit: Factors of community resilience and sustainable development” (Wouofang et al., 2021); “Social audit and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Levers of resilience and sustainable performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Morocco” (Lagoubi, & Balhadj, 2021); “Women ‘in ambush.’ What resilience for a sustainable artisanal transformation on the Petite Côte (in Senegal)?” (Thiaw et al., 2021); “Sustainable development, population displacement and environmental resilience in Cameroon” (Tchaptchet Ndamen Njindam et al., 2021).

In keeping with the *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience’s* focus on childhood and adolescence, we identified papers at the Congress that targeted these ages and found 42 from the 230 presented (18%). This commentary will be devoted to the main topics identified in these papers.

One of the issues addressed at the Congress is the resilience process during *transitional situations* such as leaving a foster family or an institution or completing a period of schooling to live in society independently. In this context, in South Africa, the role of *Ubuntu* as a cultural protective factor was emphasized (Van Breda, 2021). African culture implies an “embedded or ‘anthropocentric’ way of life”: individuals are an integral part of a larger community, and it is the community that facilitates individual self-realization. For young people leaving families or foster homes, promoting *Ubuntu* facilitates the process of resilience.

Mentoring is another factor that facilitates resilience in young people receiving care in social assistance institutions, during their transition to adulthood and towards independence. This was highlighted in the “*Now What?*” research (Tomita, 2021) carried out in Romania, Greece, Albania, and Portugal. Likewise, the process of resilience during the transition from school to adulthood can be facilitated in young people with intellectual disabilities by including, in the preparation program for the exit, a *special educational tool*, a road map facilitating socialization (Julien-Gauthier et al., 2021).

Another aspect addressed at the Yaoundé Congress is the resilience of children and adolescents in *situations of extreme violence* linked to terrorism, war, or violent deculturation. In the 1990s, during Islamist terrorism in Algeria, the *family* had an important role as a protective factor. Indeed, the young people who benefited from a containing family envelope did much better (Mansour & Mekiri, 2021). In Colombia, during the 1991–2019 armed conflict in the Choco department, the creativity involved in recreational and playful activities associated with support networks facilitated the initiation and effectiveness of the resilience process (Meneses Copete, 2021). In Canada, researchers are wondering about the role that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) can play – through legal actions or commemorations – in the process aimed at building cultural resilience among the survivors of the residential schools and their children, as well as among members of the indigenous peoples’ communities who discover the violent deculturation operated in these establishments (Rondeau, 2021).

For children and adolescents with family breakdowns living in the streets of Kinshasa and Lubumbashi (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), survival involves using resourceful strategies such as begging, carrying parcels or luggage, selling cooking spices, or shining shoes. This is often associated with behaviours considered inappropriate/asocial: e.g., theft of food, prostitution, excessive consumption of hemp, inhaling glue (Birangui, 2021). These findings show that to survive, the strategies used are very different from what the definition of resilience mention as “positive,” “good,” or “healthy” adaptation.

An important feature of the Yaoundé Congress program was the presentation of many papers devoted to resilience in relation to *somatic health problems* from the first days of life. Indeed, faced with insufficient care services for *premature babies*, the community must find ways to ensure the survival of these children and combine modern and traditional methods. As part of the latter, as shown by research carried out in Ivory Coast (Ouattara et al., 2021), the traditional methods include medicinal plants, minerals, and, more generally, local/traditional knowledge.

Another issue addressed in Yaoundé is resilience in the case of *congenital malformations*. In cases of *tetralogy of Fallot*¹, the multisectoral approach used in Cameroon makes it possible to intervene and ensure the follow-up of 90% of children with this malformation. Interviews with families and caregivers have shown (Kiyung, 2021) that caring is an important factor in developing assisted resilience in children with tetralogy of Fallot. Caring is a relevant concept

¹ Tetralogy of Fallot is the most common cyanotic heart defect and the most common cause of the blue baby syndrome. Two abnormalities (pulmonary artery stenosis and ventricular septal defect) cause hypertrophy of the right ventricle and dextro-position of the aorta.

in nursing and means attentive surveillance and actions, which lead to the relief or alleviation of symptoms and improved comfort. In the case of *hypospadias*², research conducted in Yaoundé (Lele Bomgni & Geh Bih, 2021) has shown that surgery, information provided, psychological support, and post-hospitalization follow-up improve the resilience of the involved parents.

Malnutrition has important somatic and cognitive effects. One of the papers presented (Kouenkap, 2021) indicates that, for malnourished Cameroonian children aged 36-59 months, full vaccination, the attendance of preschool, and the father's commitment to child learning increase the level of pre-literacy and pre-calculus abilities.

Used to characterize children of above-average growth in a hostile, poor environment if they receive, in addition to good quality food, affection, physical interactions, verbal and environmental stimulation, the concept of *nutritional resilience* was discussed in a paper (Frisch et al., 2021) that addressed the prevention of nutritional pathologies through training. This training included three dimensions: nutritional, psychosensory/behavioural, and socioenvironmental. The training is based on supportive psychological and educational practices for the development of resilience aimed at vulnerable groups.

Several papers addressed the process of resilience in children and their families when the diagnosis was sickle cell disease, HIV, type 1 diabetes, or, more recently, COVID-19. The *intervention* aimed at the development of resilience constituted another significant part of the communications at this Congress. One of these communications (Mboe, 2021) describes the role played, in Cameroon, by centers for the advancement of women, which support young girls to gain more autonomy, towards greater *economic resilience*, through training focused on income-generating activities.

All papers presented in Yaoundé highlighted the enrichment of knowledge on resilience through the internationalization of research in the field, the diversification of the topics addressed, and the approach of new original research directions.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose

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² A birth defect in which the opening of the urethra is on the underside of the penis instead of at the tip. It is the second-most common birth abnormality of the male reproductive system.

³ The conference program can be consulted here:

https://resilience2020.ess-ucac.org/Programme_complet_avec_resume_du_5e_congres_mondial_sur_la_resilience.pdf

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