

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (IPMG) STATEMENT

Session 5: SDG 4 and interlinkages with other SDGs - Quality education

For many Indigenous People, COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing educational inequalities stemming from geography, the digital divide, and poverty, which are all connected to historic injustices including the denial of land rights and lack of self-determined development.[1]

To build back better, Indigenous languages need to be present in local classrooms. Global research demonstrates that children who speak Indigenous languages not included in the school curriculum, exhibit lower levels of literacy and numeracy than their peers.[2] If the education sector is to be transformed to better contribute to building awareness and engage global citizens who can be change-makers, UN Member States, as well as UN Country Offices, should take to steps to include Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge in formal education systems. This can be achieved through language revitalization and mother tongue-based, multilingual education programs, in support of Sustainable Development Goal 4's promise of inclusive, quality and equitable education for all (particularly targets 4.1, 4.5, 4.6 and 4C and indicators 4.5.2, 4.5.3, 4.6.1 and 4.6.2)[3] and the educational objectives of UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages Global Action Plan (particularly outputs 1, 3 and 10).[4]

We further recommend that member states endorse UNESCO's Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion, giving special attention to the policy level and practical steps listed therein for integrating marginalized languages in the formal and informal sectors including in technical and non-technical sectors.s.[5]

Indigenous peoples recognize the value of multilingualism and multiculturalism. We further assert that our languages and cultures are an integral part of the global human heritage and we thus have the rights to "revitalize, use, develop and transmit" them to future generations.[6] Our Indigenous knowledge has been simultaneously devalued and exploited by majority cultures, with devastating effects to our communities and the natural world. The inclusion of Indigenous languages and cultures in the education system will have a positive impact on lifelong learning, while helping fulfill SDG 16's vision to "Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies."

[1] UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. (2021). Guidance Note: Ensuring Inclusive Education for Ethnolinguistic Minority Children in the COVID-19 Era. UNESCO Bangkok. <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/guidance-note-ensuring-inclusive-education-ethnolinguistic-minority-children-covid-19-era>

[2] World Bank. (2021). Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/loud-and-clear-effective-language-of-instruction-policies-for-learning>

[3] United Nations Statistics Division. (2021). Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=4>

[4] UNESCO. (2021). *Global action plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379853>

[5] UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. (2020). The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion. UNESCO Bangkok. <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/bangkok-statement-language-and-inclusion>

[6] United Nations, General Assembly. (2008). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf