

International Day of the World's Indigenous People

(UNESCO and Indigenous People)

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People, celebrated on 9 August each year is a moment to acknowledge the vital contribution of indigenous peoples to innovation and creativity, to sustainable development as well as to cultural diversity. This is essential today and tomorrow, as we shape the new post-2015 development agenda.

In September, the United Nations General Assembly will hold the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. This will review progress towards the fulfillment of indigenous peoples' rights, and efforts to implement the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Major gaps remain at all levels, which the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is committed to helping to bridge. UNESCO contributes to creating the conditions for cooperation and true dialogue, based upon respect for shared values and the dignity of each civilization and culture for the improvement of humanity's well-being and promotes the use and survival of indigenous cultures, languages, knowledge, traditions and identity, and second, to provide knowledge and skills that enable indigenous peoples to participate fully and equally in the national and international community.

UNESCO recognizes indigenous cultures as part of the common heritage of humanity. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which was unanimously adopted by the Member States in 2001, clearly states that the protection and defense of this diversity is "an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect of human dignity". According to the Declaration, the promotion of cultural diversity further implies "a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms... of indigenous peoples" (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Article 4).

The international Working Group on Indigenous Populations defines Indigenous People "...those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems." (J. Martinez Cobo, United Nations Special Rapporteur, Study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations, 1987).



Performance of Pushto Khattak Dance

At Present, indigenous peoples number between 300 and 350 million individuals or approximately 5 percent of the total world population. They represent over 5,000 languages and cultures in more than 70 countries on six continents. These groups inhabit polar regions and deserts, savannahs and forests in tropical as well as temperate zones, mountainous regions, tundra, wetlands and small islands.

Examples of indigenous peoples include the Mayas of Guatemala, the Aymaras of Bolivia and other Indians of the

Americas, the Saami of northern Europe, Kalashas of Pakistan and Maori of New Zealand. Most indigenous peoples have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics clearly distinct from those of other segments of national populations. During the First International Decade

of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004), significant progress was achieved with regards to indigenous peoples' rights. However, the situation of indigenous peoples is not uniform. Many communities have experienced dramatic decline in numbers while others are undergoing recovery or expansion. Today most countries in South America constitutionally recognize indigenous peoples' land rights and the multi-ethnic nature of their populations. Yet, in many countries indigenous peoples are still deprived of their rights as equal citizens and face serious discrimination in terms of access to their native lands and natural resources, basic social services including education and health care. Often due to forced displacement, indigenous peoples live increasingly in urban and suburban areas, and many survive on the fringes of society, in precarious and impoverished conditions.



Local performers of South Punjab

ways of life, livelihoods, spirituality and cultures are inextricably intertwined with their traditional environments. Furthermore, the material, environmental and spiritual conditions of indigenous peoples, together with their world views and intimate relationship with the land and natural resources, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of globalization. The resulting instability, aggravated by dispossession from their land and natural resources, has disrupted the handing down of their cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Yet, indigenous peoples remain deeply committed to the

Pakistan is also home to a significant number of smaller indigenous and tribal peoples, such as the Kihals and Mors, indigenous peoples of the Indus, the Buzdar from the Suleiman Mountains and the Kalasha people in Chitral. These smaller groups, many of whom are semi nomadic boat people or pastoralists, are often not accounted for in national census figures. In many cases, their vulnerability is further exacerbated by mainstream development processes.

The continued existence of indigenous communities is closely linked to their ability to influence their own fate and preserve and

develop their cultural and social intuitions. Indigenous



Caption: Kalasha Women-UNESCO Mapping Project

protection and transmission of their culture and it is vital that the international community, as part of its full support.



UNESCO's activities with indigenous peoples are framed by its missions to protect and promote cultural diversity, encourage intercultural dialogue and enhance linkages between culture and development. The organization is thus actively involved in implementing the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-2014) which is intended to strengthen

international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health, building on efforts initiated during the First Decade (1995-2004). The adoption of the Second Decade reflects increasing awareness of the precarious condition of indigenous peoples and strengthened collaboration between indigenous organizations, governments, NGOs and United Nations agencies. This international mobilization has entailed significant advances such as the adoption in September 2007 of the Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples by the UN General Assembly, which the UNESCO Director General welcomed as a "milestone for indigenous peoples and all those who are committed to the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue".



Indigenous way of Construction-UNESCO Mapping Project

UNESCO's partnership with indigenous peoples builds on several areas of focus, including: Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage, Endangered Languages, Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Education, Local and Indigenous Knowledge System, Cultural Mapping and Enhancing Communication Capacities of Indigenous People. In its current Medium-term Strategy (2008-2013), UNESCO places the needs of indigenous peoples amongst its priority areas for response. UNESCO is leading the way in education with two angles of action – first, to promote the use and survival

of indigenous cultures, languages, knowledge, traditions and identity, and second, to provide knowledge and skills that enable indigenous peoples to participate fully and equally in the national and international community.

UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme aims to advance respect for indigenous peoples' rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their traditional knowledge, and to participate in environmental decision-making. LINKS is a UNESCO interdisciplinary initiative that brings together expertise from the Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Culture, Communication & Information and Education to secure an active and equitable role for local & indigenous communities in resource management and support the meaningful inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation and management.



Local Weaver at South Punjab-UNESCO Craft Project

UNESCO Islamabad office has been contributing to safeguard the Indigenous communities and knowledge through its various initiatives in Pakistan. The initiative of "Mapping of Cultural Assets in Pakistan" aimed at documenting and organizing the data on the indigenous cultural resources and promoting cultural identities of the ingenious people of Pakistan. Under this project the cultural data mapped in six districts including Peshawar, Mardan, Chitral, Mansehra, Bahawalpur and Multan and capacity of the indigenous people developed to map their cultural resources. UNESCO's Islamabad

office is carrying out a very important initiative

on integrating cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning under which National Guidelines and resource material on the subject has been developed. The teachers' capacity was enhanced to integrate cultural heritage into education in order to strengthen the knowledge transmission across and within generations and promote peace through developing the concept of cultural diversity and intercultural harmony among youth.



A Local artisan in Pishin-UNESCO Wool Craft Project

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage aims to safeguard and promote the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the associated instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces that indigenous communities, groups and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. UNESCO has been focusing on the building the institutional capacity on the effective implementation of the Convention at both provincial and federal level. UNESCO Islamabad has been executing a number of projects in promoting indigenous skills of local marginalized communities in handicrafts in various parts of Pakistan including Swat,

Mansehra, South Punjab, Pishin and Thatta in order to revive the centuries old craft skills and link their indigenous way of life to their livelihoods.

Sources:

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<http://www.ilo.org/indigenous/Activitiesbyregion/Asia/SouthAsia/Pakistan/lang--en/index.htm>