



**Cultural Challenges of the International Decade of
the World's indigenous People**

18-20 October 1999, UNESCO Headquarters

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1. INTRODUCTION

The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was officially launched in December 1994. The decade has now approached its mid-point giving rise to reflections on the progress made so far in terms of fulfilling the theme of the Decade – "Partnership in Action". The programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People recognizes the value and diversity of the cultures and forms of social organization of indigenous people and their contribution to the socio-economic, cultural and environmental advancement of all countries of the world. It establishes as the main objective of the Decade " the strengthening of international co-operation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, health, culture and education ". Further, the education of indigenous and non-indigenous societies concerning the situation, cultures, languages, rights and aspirations of indigenous people is emphasized as a major objective of the Decade.

UNESCO is renewing its concern for the most endangered of all cultural groups: the world's indigenous people. There are some 350 million indigenous people in more than 70 countries around the globe, speaking autochthonous languages, and who are marginalized and frequently denied basic human rights, including their cultural rights. In this context UNESCO programmes support the initiatives of indigenous people themselves, helping them develop their own advocacy platforms and building awareness among the general population.

In this respect, UNESCO organized a three-day workshop entitled "Cultural Challenges of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People" in order, among other things, to address indigenous issues with respect to education, culture, sciences, communication and gender. Questions pertaining to cultural property rights, environment, preservation of languages, traditional knowledge, modernity and identity in the context of globalization were also addressed. The meeting looked especially into the contribution of indigenous cultures to a universal culture.

Some forty participants, including indigenous organizations from around the world, policy-makers and representatives of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other organizations of the United Nations system, attended the 3-day meeting on the Cultural Challenges of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Mr Colin Power, opened the workshop in the name of the Director-General. Professor Dr. Erica-Irene Daes, Chairperson, Rapporteur of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, read a message from Mrs Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and addressed the participants, recalling the background as well as the challenges for the remainder of the Decade. In the name of the Director-General, the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture, Mr Hernán Crespo-Toral, closed the meeting.

One of the basic objectives of the workshop was to continue the constructive and dynamic dialogue between indigenous people and UNESCO. It provided an opportunity for indigenous people to express their views and to make proposals for the elaboration of projects and programmes in the areas of competence of UNESCO which encompass indigenous people. The workshop contributed to the development of more positive theories and practices regarding cultural pluralism as a basis for promoting social cohesion and a mechanism for avoiding the generation of political conflict on the grounds of identity.

In this respect, it should be underlined that cultural challenges speak to both opportunities and responsibilities. The following challenges are of critical importance and significance:

- how to decolonize the legacy of cognitive imperialism;
- how to support and enhance the Indigenous Renaissance;
- how to further develop the practice and foundations of intercultural diplomacy;
- how to achieve sustainable cultural pluralism as a result of genuine cultural diversity;
- how to build a political and cultural environment in which the rights and in particular the dignity of indigenous people will be effectively respected;
- how to develop a genuinely intercultural education which applies not only to the indigenous communities but also to the whole society;
- how to promote culture as the motor of sustainable development.

2. THEMES OF DISCUSSION

There is a clear concern that not enough is being done by different UN agencies to call attention to the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and that the time has come for more concerted action on behalf of the UN as a whole. UNESCO has a long history of working with indigenous people. There are many initiatives currently taking place dispersed in the different sectors of the Organization and within the Regional Offices. Yet these need to be drawn together both to provide a systematization of the work and to present a coherent policy that reflects the mission of the Organization as distinct from the other UN agencies. For example, there have been many meetings held recently on education, on sacred sites, on their cultural expressions, on gender, on the relation between modern science and traditional knowledge as well as ongoing research and projects. What is required now is to evaluate and reorientate UNESCO's work in the remaining years of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

In order to initiate such a policy and plan of action, the Division of Cultural Pluralism and the UNESCO Institute for Education organized an international workshop on the Cultural Challenges of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. In this workshop, four major issues were discussed: citizenship and identity; knowledge, learning and education; culture and development; and the challenges of globalization.

A. Citizenship and identity

The session on citizenship and identity was intended to address the question of how the development of an indigenous cultural identity can be reconciled with full and equal citizenship within national states. The workshop also tried to answer the question of how indigenous organizations are contributing to the development of multicultural, pluriethnic and multilingual states. What mechanisms are there for co-operation between indigenous people?

The workshop concluded that full citizenship rights for indigenous people can only be achieved through the recognition of pluriculturalism, of which cultural citizenship is an important aspect, going beyond traditional models of bilingualism and biculturalism. In order to achieve this, democratic rights must be strengthened and indigenous participation developed. There was agreement that an adequate communication policy must be developed, not only to allow indigenous people to communicate through modern media with each

other, but also to educate the general public and to train public officials on indigenous issues. Finally, indigenous organizations must be empowered in order to be able to negotiate effectively and on a peaceful basis with governments on basic issues such as human rights, natural resources, education, cultural and civic identity and political participation.

B. Knowledge, learning and education

The workshop posed the question of how education can be best framed to serve the interests of indigenous people in multilingual contexts. Should literacy in the mother tongue be a bridge to formal education, or an end in itself? How can indigenous people make a greater contribution to national education systems?

All the participants recognized the variety of systems of knowledge, as well as the different forms of production, application and transmission of knowledge. They recognized that community elders play a major role in passing on traditional knowledge. Emphasis was placed on the pre-eminently social character of learning, the strong link between learning and action and the importance of ceremonies, rituals and songs in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge in indigenous societies.

There is a need for a curriculum for indigenous people in which community and schools, traditional leaders and school teachers get together to combine traditional and modern knowledge. Intercultural education was recommended as a model that can promote the articulation of the two systems of education. Intercultural education should be characteristic of the education system in general, because it is the majority society that most requires to adapt to conditions of diversity. In this context, participants requested UNESCO to promote the development and strengthening of intercultural education and to organize the production of a report on the education of indigenous people.

C. Culture and development

The workshop analysed a number of questions. How can we best preserve and promote the tangible and intangible heritage of indigenous populations, while at the same time encouraging their creativity and innovation? How can we open up access to their culture without the risk of changing their cultural expression? How can we protect places of memory and sacred natural sites threatened by an

economic concept of development? How can we oppose the reduction of culture to a merchandise from which these populations would not draw any economic benefit? Does a legal framework exist which will guarantee the intellectual property rights of indigenous populations? How can we avoid isolating indigenous populations in cultural ghettos?

The participants acknowledged that UNESCO could play a role of catalyst in implementing all these actions based on two complementary principles: on the one hand, by accompanying and supporting indigenous cultural identity and on the other hand protecting the different forms of indigenous cultural expression and promoting their contribution to universal civilization. From the first point of view, UNESCO's role must be to sensitize Member States in order to undertake concrete actions to promote the idea of a "cultural citizenship" which embraces indigenous cultural and civic identity as part of a broader framework of cultural pluralism. This implies a deepening of intercultural dialogue as the basis for a better understanding of the wealth of each culture and of cultural diversity as an asset to each State.

From the second point of view, UNESCO has to preserve the tangible and intangible heritage of indigenous populations while encouraging their creativity and sense of innovation, in order to promote better understanding and use of traditional knowledge systems and to sustain the societies that are the guardians of these systems of knowledge. This action aims to prevent the cultural goods from being treated as mere commercial goods and to guarantee that the former are not taken away from indigenous populations because they are symbols of their identity. UNESCO has to promote the regulation of cultural industries and the implementation of the international instruments which help to acknowledge the intellectual property of the creations, knowledge and know-how of indigenous populations who have enriched the common heritage of mankind.

D. The challenges of globalization

Here the participants attempted to answer a further series of questions. What is the impact of globalization on the everyday life and social structures of indigenous people (poverty, migration, new forms of family structure, etc)? What are the changing patterns in traditional forms of organization? How is the development of the information society and the introduction of new technologies affecting indigenous people? What is the new role of indigenous women? How can indigenous populations draw on their traditions to bring about a type

of modernity that will not imply the denial of their original identity?

The participants concluded that constitutional reforms, new legislation, new policies and new programmes in favour of promoting development with cultural sustainability are essential for dealing with the challenges of globalization. At the same time participants stressed that indigenous cultures have developed an ability to adapt and to resist the external pressures of cultural and economic globalization. The role of indigenous women should be strengthened and new projects in this direction should be developed.

UNESCO must promote the implementation of the legal and programmatic international, regional and national instruments in favour of indigenous people. UNESCO must also show to the international community the contribution of indigenous people in processes of regional integration with cultural preservation, such as in the cases of Central America and Amazonia.

3. INDIGENOUS/TRIBAL PEOPLE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Paris, 20 October 1999

We, the indigenous/tribal participants at this meeting want to express and put forward the following resolutions:

1. Whereas the issue of indigenous/tribal people is a very important international and national issue and this importance will increase in the next millennium, particularly because of globalization,
2. Whereas the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning affirmed in Articles 15 and 18 the right to learn of indigenous/tribal people worldwide,
3. Whereas broadening the understanding and recognition of indigenous/tribal people's rights is a dual responsibility of governments and indigenous/tribal people,
4. Whereas UNESCO's own cultural policies beginning in the year 2000 state that the new programme will be based on the "mobilisation of expertise, networks and new knowledge through advocacy and partnership",
5. Whereas indigenous/tribal people have repeatedly stated their need for cultural projects, learning and training that is on-going and which

incorporates their language, culture, learning styles and aspirations,

6. Whereas UNESCO deals with development in many different ways, such as human development, sustainable development and cultural development within its many different programmes, this is creating confusion amongst indigenous/tribal people in all countries, there is a need for greater co-ordination across all programmes of UNESCO particularly with respect to indigenous/tribal people's sustainable cultural development,

7. Whereas numerous UN organizations and donor agencies are developing indigenous/tribal people's policies and programmes and these are not being co-ordinated.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND TO UNESCO'S GENERAL CONFERENCE:

1. That the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People requires a mid-term evaluation to determine the real impact of the decade on the sustainable cultural development of indigenous/tribal people and to re-orient relevant activities for the period 2000-2004.

2. That UNESCO develop an indigenous/tribal people's policy as well as appropriate plans of action and programmes and that these plans of action and programmes include those initiatives provided in the following recommended plan of action.

3. That UNESCO create and support a working-group comprised of indigenous/tribal and non-indigenous/tribal experts responsible for the preparation of UNESCO's indigenous/tribal people's policy, plan of action and programmes.

4. That UNESCO undertake a programme of advocacy and co-ordination on issues of indigenous/tribal people's development with other UN agencies and Member States.

RECOMMENDED PLAN OF ACTION

The recommended plan of action invites UNESCO to rethink its policy on indigenous people from a holistic perspective reflecting the way indigenous people themselves conceive the world.

1. Establish of a world data bank on indigenous people.

2. Carry out research on areas of strategic concern which involve

indigenous researchers in the work of UNESCO.

3. Develop ethical guidelines which ensure that projects and programmes targeted at indigenous/tribal people meet the needs and aspirations of indigenous/tribal people and accommodate their culture, language and learning styles, taking into account other existing guidelines and codes of conduct.

4. Strengthen the UNESCO Indigenous People's Focal Point for the World Decade and communicate activities of this function and of the role and responsibility of the position to indigenous/tribal people on UNESCO website and by other means.

5. Promote the exchange of experiences and know-how between indigenous organizations and between universities and other institutions in different countries and regions of the world.

6. Conduct studies of exploitation of indigenous/tribal cultural artifacts and knowledge related to copyright questions and the removal of economic benefit from the original source.

7. Conduct studies on indigenous/tribal people's tangible and intangible heritage and develop approaches to resolve conflicts associated with the use of this heritage in participation with indigenous/tribal people.

8. Organize and support workshops for indigenous/tribal cultural workers of different fields (writers, musicians, theatre workers, etc) to exchange experiences, lessons learned and successes.

9. Support the development by and for the benefit of, indigenous/tribal people of banks of world indigenous art forms subject to their being adequately protected.

10. Conduct studies on the contribution of indigenous culture(s) to universal culture and civilization.

11. Conduct regular monitoring of the progress of cultural development within indigenous/tribal communities, in a multicultural context, and publish this information in the World Culture Report and other relevant UNESCO publications.

12. Conduct studies and evaluation of experiences with multicultural, bi- and multilingual education ("Best Practices") and make relevant

recommendations.

13. Conduct studies on how the real life, culture and heritage of indigenous/tribal people are reflected in national curriculae and teaching materials in education.

14. Develop programmes designed to educate governments, academia and industry on the needs, traditions, knowledge and cultural heritage of indigenous/tribal people.

15. Conduct further surveys and disseminate information on the nature, scope, problems and issues related to indigenous/tribal people, education received currently, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

16. Develop educational and training programmes for indigenous people in relation to indigenous people's rights, techniques of negotiation, and leadership skills.

17. Expand upon the activities in Africa of studies of language planning among indigenous/tribal people, especially with experiences in the development of written standards, for use by other regions' indigenous/tribal people. This work should include transborder co-operation in language planning (Inuit, Quechua, Sami).

18. Support the development of indigenous/tribal media, in written and other forms. This could include support for the development of indigenous/tribal film and TV centres for training of journalists.

19. Conduct studies on the impact of development on indigenous/tribal people, with special focus on the Arctic region (Siberia), tropical rainforests and coastal marine zones.

20. Conduct studies on areas identified as biosphere reserves and protected areas and managed by indigenous/tribal people.

21. Elaborate a legal framework for indigenous/tribal people, providing specific expertise in order to ensure access to natural resources for the purpose of continuation and preservation of cultural traditions and medicinal practices.

22. Conduct studies to protect and further develop the knowledge generated and perpetuated by local communities through awareness-raising, training programmes, international property rights

arrangements, and validation procedures.

23. Conduct studies to document and analyse the ethical issues associated with indigenous/tribal people's hunting and fishing practices and subsistence used in contrast to national and international regulations.