



2008 - International Year of Languages



“Languages are indeed essential to the identity of groups and individuals and to their peaceful coexistence. They constitute a strategic factor of progress towards sustainable development and a harmonious relationship between the global and the local context. Only if multilingualism is fully accepted can all languages find their place in our globalized world.

UNESCO therefore invites governments, United Nations organizations, civil society organizations, educational institutions, professional associations and all other stakeholders to increase their own activities to foster respect for, and the promotion and protection of all languages, particularly endangered languages, in all individual and collective contexts.”

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

Director-General of UNESCO
Message for the International Year
of Languages 2008

01 The International Year of Languages Introduction

LANGUAGES, WITH THEIR COMPLEX IMPLICATIONS FOR IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION, EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT,

are of strategic importance for people and planet. Yet, due to globalization processes, they are increasingly under threat, or disappearing altogether. When languages fade, so does the world’s rich tapestry of cultural diversity. Opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression – valuable resources for ensuring a better future – are also lost.

More than 50 per cent of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken in the world are likely to die out within a few generations, and 96 per cent of these languages are spoken by a mere 4 per cent of the world’s population. Only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given pride of place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world.

Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, the promotion of education for all and the development of knowledge societies are central to UNESCO’s work. But they are not possible without broad and international commitment to promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity, including the preservation of endangered languages.

As part of this commitment, the UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages, and named UNESCO as the lead agency. This initiative should not only increase awareness of language issues, but also mobilize partners and resources for supporting the implementation of strategies and policies in favour of language diversity and multilingualism in all parts of the world.

LANGUAGES: ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

As the highly interdisciplinary domain of languages and multilingualism is strategic in regard to the most essential challenges facing humankind, it must be taken into account in the development of strategies to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

1)

Linguistic factors play a strategic role in the **eradication of extreme poverty and hunger** (Millennium Development Goal 1) as the ability to obtain a livelihood, to participate

UNESCO AND MULTILINGUALISM

UNESCO’s action for multilingualism aims at encouraging the development of coherent regional and national language policies that are conducive to the appropriate use of languages in a given community and country. Such policies promote measures allowing each speaker community to use its mother tongue in private and public domains of language use and enabling the speakers to learn and use additional languages: local, national and international. Mother-tongue speakers of national or international languages should be encouraged to learn and use other languages of the country as well as regional and international languages.



in social and public life and to engage in dialogue is dependent, to a great extent, on language skills. Marginalization vs integration, exclusion vs empowerment, poverty vs development are heavily affected by linguistic policies and practices.

2)

As a principal medium of knowledge transmission, languages are essential to **achieving universal primary education** (Millennium Development Goal 2) and **responding to HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases** (Millennium Development Goal 6). To be effective and adapted to the culture and needs of learners, education (including health education) and literacy programmes must be delivered in languages understood by those learners.

3)

Inasmuch as languages enfold and convey local and indigenous knowledge and know-how of the natural milieu, sound management of natural resources is also linked to the protection and promotion of languages. For this reason, languages are also strategic for **environmental sustainability** (Millennium Development Goal 7).

4)

Finally, the actual **enjoyment of fundamental rights** (expression, education, participation in cultural life, benefiting from scientific progress) is conditioned to a large extent by linguistic factors. Appropriate language policies thus provide an essential medium for exercising those rights.

INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE INSTRUMENTS FOR PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY, LANGUAGES AND MULTILINGUALISM

The international community has adopted a wide range of agreements to promote and protect languages. As part of this movement, UNESCO plays an essential role in advocating, supporting and monitoring policies and actions in favour of cultural diversity and multilingualism on the international level, and has developed a number of standard-setting instruments to that end:

- Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)
- UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and its Action Plan (2001)
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)
- Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace (2003)
- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)

UNESCO also endorses the principles underlying UN instruments addressing language issues, such as the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).



2008 - International Year of Languages



“Our common goal is to ensure that the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in educational, administrative and legal systems, cultural expressions and the media, cyberspace and trade, is recognized at the national, regional and international levels.”

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO

JOINING FORCES WITHIN UNESCO TO PROMOTE LANGUAGES AND MULTILINGUALISM

Starting from the acknowledgement of the vital interaction between linguistic and cultural diversity, and the principle of equality of all cultures and languages, UNESCO developed a joint strategy for mobilizing the programmes related to languages in each of its five fields of action: education, culture, social and human sciences, science and communication and information. A task force, chaired by the Director-General, brings together the heads of all programme areas. An intersectoral network of staff working on language-related projects is responsible for moving the agenda forward.

The UNESCO portal for the promotion of languages has been established to provide information about UNESCO's activities and those of its various partners all over the world (<http://www.unesco.org/en/languages>).

**02 UNESCO
A full commitment
to linguistic diversity and
multilingualism**



ON 16 MAY 2007, THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PROCLAIMED 2008 THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES.

As language issues are central to UNESCO's mandate in education, science, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information, the Organization has been designated as the lead agency for this celebration.

The International Year of Languages comes at a time when linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened. Language is fundamental to communication of all kinds, and it is communication that makes change and development possible in human society. Using – or not using – certain languages today can open a door, or close it, for large segments of society in many parts of the world.

In the meantime, there is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in strengthening co-operation and attaining quality education for all, in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage, and in mobilizing political will for applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development.

Addressing these issues is crucial for achieving development goals and constitutes an important part of UNESCO's mission.

A new strategy for integrating language, culture and development

Encouraged by its Member States, UNESCO has developed an intersectoral strategy on languages and multilingualism for the 2008–2013 period, which will help consolidate the role of languages in development strategies and foster cultural diversity and dialogue. To this end, UNESCO is working at the local, national and regional levels to support the elaboration of language policies that promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism in all aspects of language use.

Globally, UNESCO advocates, supports and monitors actions in favour of the principles enshrined in UNESCO and UN international normative instruments related to languages and multilingualism (see Box listing normative instruments). This work requires preliminary analysis, forging a coherent shared vision of the principles to be followed, communicating these, and then monitoring their implementation by using indicators and statistical evidence. The next step is to promote effective practices and demonstrate practical outcomes.



2008 - International Year of Languages



INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by UNESCO's General Conference in November 1999 and has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. The International Day is celebrated yearly (on 21 February) with exhibitions, concerts and presentations at UNESCO Headquarters and venues around the world.

Past themes have included linkages between mother tongue and multilingualism, especially in education; Braille and sign languages; how children learn and master written literacy skills in classrooms around the world (with an exhibition of exercise books at UNESCO Headquarters); raising awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue; and protecting the intangible heritage of humanity and preserving cultural diversity.

Contributions from all of UNESCO's five programme areas

UNESCO's work on languages and multilingualism takes many forms – building capacity, research and analysis, raising awareness, supporting projects, developing networks, disseminating information. As these activities are interdisciplinary in nature, they are spread throughout UNESCO's five programme areas, each one addressing particular aspects of language issues. These include:

- *Education* – promoting inclusion and quality learning by supporting bi- and multi-lingual education, especially the use of mother-tongues, at all levels and in formal and non-formal settings, with special attention to teacher training, literacy provision and health education.
- *Science* – enhancing communication and collaboration between scientific researchers and institutions across linguistic divides; translating and disseminating scientific materials to communities to overcome language barriers; recognizing the central role of vernacular languages to indigenous ways of knowing.
- *Social and human sciences* – languages and human rights and cultural rights, migrations and urbanization and other social issues (e.g. exclusion and poverty).
- *Culture* – cultural diversity, dialogue and exchange, protecting cultural heritage, safeguarding endangered languages (e.g. through translations and publications).
- *Communication and information* – building knowledge societies in which everyone can participate and benefit; promoting universal access to information and wider access to ICTs through the use of a greater number of languages; promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the media and international information networks.

Partnerships are essential: let's work together

The success of UNESCO's work on languages and multilingualism depends on the effective mobilization of UNESCO's Member States and field offices, regional and national networks, civil society and private partners, and on the creation of a variety of partnerships. Special attention needs to be given to developing synergies, alliances and networks within the UNESCO family, including the Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) and University Chairs, as well as with specialized networks and institutes, especially in the fields of research, monitoring and policy development, within and beyond the UN system.



2008 - International Year of Languages



EDUCATION

Equity and social justice through universal access to quality basic education

03

EFA: QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD, YOUTH AND ADULT BY 2015

Meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, 160 countries and territories promised: to expand early childhood care and education; to provide free and universal primary school for all children; to achieve gender parity and equality; to greatly reduce illiteracy and expand learning opportunities for youth and adults, and to improve the quality of education across the board – by 2015.

LITERACY IN LOCAL LANGUAGES: A GATEWAY TO LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

Worldwide, some 774 million adults cannot read or write. Two-thirds of these are women. In addition, more than 72.1 million children who should be in school, are not. Yet literacy and access to good quality education is a right. Literacy is crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in today's knowledge societies. It is a key to wide-ranging benefits including critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction, and active citizenship. For all these reasons, UNESCO seeks to develop political commitment to literacy.

Language is closely related to literacy acquisition and the development of literate communities. In multilingual settings, the choice of the languages of instruction in literacy programmes and in schooling has a



THE ABILITY TO READ AND WRITE WITH COMPREHENSION AND TO THINK CRITICALLY ARE KEY OUTCOMES OF QUALITY EDUCATION.

Education itself is a human right, a tool for learning and a vehicle for transmitting knowledge. It also helps build identity in a culturally diverse but globalized world.

The appropriate use of languages in literacy provision and education has a beneficial effect on access to learning, inclusion in schools, and learning outcomes. The use of mother tongues in education impacts positively on children's attendance and performance in school.

While today we recognize that multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception in most settings, many education systems have yet to address the needs of learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As a result, many children do not attend school or drop out, suffer from low achievement. Responding to the challenge of providing universal basic quality education for all, UNESCO is working to establish policies and practices that promote three principles set forth in its position paper on "Education in a Multilingual World". UNESCO supports:

- 1) Mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers;
- 2) Bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies;
- 3) Language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

This work is carried out in partnership with the UNESCO network of Institutes, field offices and other UN, and bilateral agencies.



significant impact on access to literacy and the level of acquisition and use. Learning to read and write in a language one understands and has sufficient command of – usually one’s mother tongue or first language – facilitates the learning process and access to literacy in other languages, both national and international. UNESCO therefore promotes the use of multilingual approaches in literacy programmes to expand education opportunities for all at all levels.

SOME PROPOSED AREAS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008:

- ↳ Bi- and multi-lingual education: policies, effective practices, learning and teaching material, teacher training.
- ↳ Literacy in a multilingual context: effective practices, learning and teaching material, teacher training.

ACTIVITIES LIST

Here are some examples of activities that relate to the three UNESCO principles on language in education:

- **Expert meetings on the role of languages in education policies:** Education in Multilingual Contexts (2002), Quality Education for Indigenous Peoples (2003) and Indigenous Education in the 21st century (2004); roundtables on Literacy in a Multilingual Context on the occasion of UNESCO’s Regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy in Beijing, China and New Delhi, India (2007).
- **Publication and wide dissemination of advocacy tools** for bi- and multi-lingual education and as orientation for national education policies:
 - A position paper entitled *Education in a Multilingual World* (2003);
 - *An Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded* (2006), UNESCO Bangkok Office;
 - A strategy document: *Teacher Training on Additive Bilingual Education in a Multilingual Context* (2004);
 - *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (2006);
 - *Educational Policies to Attain Cultural Diversity: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, Discrimination and Pluralism: Facing Cultural Diversity in School*, and *Cultural Diversity: Educational Materials for Teachers Training and Work in Classrooms* (since 2003), OREALC, Santiago, Chile.
- **Support for pilot projects** in bi- and multi-lingual education, involving production of manuals, teacher training, capacity-building and advocacy;
- **Support for research studies** on bi- and multilingual education and literacy programmes;
- **Annual publication of a EFA Global Monitoring Report** to assess country progress towards the six goals agreed in Dakar (*see box*), with special mention of language issues in learning.



2008 - International Year of Languages



AN INDEX FOR LITERARY TREASURES

UNESCO's *Index Translationum* was created in 1932. The database now contains cumulative bibliographical information on books translated and published in some 100 UNESCO Member States since 1979, totaling more than 1.7 million on-line entries in all disciplines. Thanks to international cooperation, the *Index* is unique. Each year, the bibliography centres or national libraries of participating countries provide UNESCO with bibliographical data on books that have been translated. Print editions of the *Index* from 1932 to 1978 are available in all national depository libraries and at the UNESCO library in Paris.

A VERY SPECIAL ATLAS

UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* provides a worldwide overview of endangered languages. After two print editions (1996 and 2001), an online atlas browsable by language or location was prepared in 2004, starting with a clickable map of the African continent and entries on 100 endangered African languages mentioned in the print Atlas (see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas>). The online atlas has been developed as an interdisciplinary initiative between the Culture Sector and the Communication and Information Sector. A thoroughly revised third print edition of the *Atlas* is planned for 2008.

04 Language, dialogue and heritage intertwined

CULTURE

SINCE ADOPTING THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN 2001,

UNESCO has put greater emphasis on the role of language and languages in shaping culture and development. This is now reflected in the cultural action plans and policies that countries are establishing.

UNESCO promotes cultural diversity, dialogue and exchange, and the safeguarding of endangered languages and oral traditions as a means of protecting intangible heritage.

Languages: a precious link to the past... and the future

In March 2003, UNESCO brought together experts from all over the world to review its work on endangered languages. Three priorities emerged:

- Raising awareness – in government institutions and among the general public, media, experts and NGOs – of the importance of preserving linguistic diversity, endangered languages and oral traditions.
- Developing UNESCO's capacity as a clearing house for information (including databases) both in printed form and online to all those concerned with safeguarding and promoting linguistic diversity.
- Building capacity in Member States (e.g. by training local people in language description and encouraging governments to carry out surveys and research on endangered languages) so that they can implement effective policies and projects to revitalize such languages.

The Intangible Heritage Section, in cooperation with field offices and outside partners, has followed up on these recommendations. It is working in line with the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and within the framework of the Endangered Languages Programme, while using and promoting a comprehensive tool for assessing the degree of language vitality/endangerment, which was developed by UNESCO's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages.

Intercultural dialogue, regional integration and cultural exchange

UNESCO also recognizes languages' vital role in forging cultural identities and promoting regional integration and intercultural dialogue.



SOME PROPOSED AREAS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008:

- ↳ Safeguarding endangered languages.
- ↳ Translating projects, especially from and into lesser known languages.
- ↳ Publishing in all languages.

Two examples of cooperation:

- Partnership through UNESCO field offices with the African Union's African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) to support regional meetings on the linguistic dimensions of African integration.
- Building a Bilingual Bridge (Spanish and English), initiated by the Kingston Field Office at the request of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Lucia, Barbados and Antigua. The aim is to increase cooperation in the Latin American and Caribbean region by promoting both languages in all aspects of cultural life, as well as in formal and non-formal education and on the Internet.

Translation builds bridges too

The Culture Sector has created two indispensable online tools for promoting intercultural dialogue. The Clearing House for Literary Translation site helps translators, publishers, researchers, archivists, and teachers engaged in the discovery and promotion of still unknown literatures. The *Index Translationum*, is an international bibliography of translations from and into neglected languages totaling 3 million entries in all disciplines. Over 1.7 million are available online free of charge.

ACTIVITIES LIST

Some representative projects for promoting cultural diversity, dialogue and exchange, and safeguarding endangered languages and oral traditions and expressions:

Support to pilot projects on language preservation

- Training workshops for indigenous primary school teachers on the use of Maya oral traditions in Mexican classrooms (Yucatan, Mexico).
- Preparation of language material and training workshops for local experts and community members in language documentation techniques for the Khang ethnic minority (Hanoi Office) and for Melanesia and the Pacific (Apia Office).
- Collecting and disseminating traditional songs from different provinces in China and investigating eight local languages (Beijing Office).

UNESCO Register of Good Practices in Language Preservation

Development of advocacy tools and publications

- Production of 18 short films featuring different endangered languages, and their diffusion in 160 countries, in partnership with Discovery Communications, Inc.
- Forthcoming *UNESCO Manual on Safeguarding Oral Traditions and Expressions*.
- Since 1988, UNESCO's Havana Office has published the journal *ORALIDAD* entirely devoted to promoting the oral traditions of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- First authoritative website on Caribbean indigenous and endangered languages (CIEL), developed in partnership with the Language Unit of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Development of an indicator for determining "Status and trends in linguistic diversity and numbers of speakers of indigenous languages", by collating, evaluating and analysing language statistics and conducting a large sample survey based on UNESCO's "Language Vitality and Endangerment" methodology; a joint UNESCO/ UNEP project.



2008 - International Year of Languages



**THE B@BEL INITIATIVE:
FOSTERING MULTILINGUALISM
IN CYBERSPACE**

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, in line with paragraph 10 of the Action Plan of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). In response, it launched the B@bel Initiative, which uses information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support linguistic and cultural diversity in cyberspace and protect and preserve languages in danger of disappearing.

Although the B@bel Initiative is coordinated by the Communication and Information Sector, its multiple activities are developed on an intersectoral basis. These include:

- creation of a sound record library of endangered languages;
- development of an interactive online extension of UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*;
- development of a multilingual content management platform supporting Internet use;
- preparation of pilot-free software projects for digital inclusion of indigenous languages; and
- creation of a module for endangered language communities, which includes a mechanism for systematic support of language preservation.

By reducing linguistic barriers to information, the B@bel Initiative is contributing to bridging the digital divide as well as advancing UNESCO's efforts to foster knowledge societies, promote universal information access and achieve education for all.

**COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION
Language and
multilingualism in today's
knowledge societies**

05

**IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATION NETWORKS,
LANGUAGE QUESTIONS ARE ESPECIALLY THORNY.**

Today certain languages can open a door, or close it, for large sections of society in many parts of the world. This can lead to even greater exclusion and disparities among people and communities and makes the need for action compelling.

UNESCO's communication activities, also implemented with the Culture, Education, and Science sectors, address these pressing issues: How can we build knowledge societies in which everyone participates and benefits, and how can we promote universal access to information? The Communication and Information Sector has put in place the following three-part strategy:

- **Policy formulation:** These activities support initiatives by Member States to establish policies for promoting multilingualism and universal access to information in cyberspace, in the media and international information networks. They also include public information on health care, management and legal matters.
- **Information dissemination:** The focus is on collecting and developing information resources on language (including databases and case studies), sharing experiences in multilingualism and promoting best practices. Diverse linguistic approaches and tools are noted, as are the status of languages, institutions and policies addressing language issues.
- **Research and pilot projects:** Aimed at widening access to information in all languages on the Internet, increasing the number of sites and portals with multilingual content and scripts, and developing tools for exchanging, recognizing, translating and preserving knowledge through information and communication technologies.

Ownership through local content

Through its Creative Content programme, UNESCO supports creativity and innovation in producing local content for radio, television and the news media. It promotes public service broadcasting (including educational and cultural programmes) in all languages and aims to improve audiovisual quality, especially in developing countries. This support also strengthens capacity in software and script development, and promotes script encoding that uses Unicode – a standard required for the representation of texts in modern software products and standards.



ACTIVITIES LIST

SOME PROPOSED AREAS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008:

- ↳ Multilingualism in cyberspace.
- ↳ Radio programmes in all languages.

Guidance on communication issues

As a follow-up to decisions taken at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS – Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005), UNESCO has joined forces with other actors to foster cooperation and provide guidance on language issues. For example:

- UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) organized the “Global Symposium on the Multilingual Internet, (Geneva 2006); subsequently UNESCO was designated as facilitator of the action on cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.
- UNESCO organized with ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) and NTRA (National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Egypt) a workshop entitled Towards a Multilingual Global Internet: Avoiding the Risk of Fragmentation (Athens 2006)
- Every year since 2004, the UNESCO Kingston Office has supported the Conference on Cultural Diversity and the Caribbean Information Society (CARDICIS), which provides a major opportunity for information sharing, partnership and policy proposals in the Caribbean.

Capacity-building, software and local content development

- Projects offering training in multilingual and local book publishing, in collaboration with the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), UNESCO Dakar and UNESCO Bamako Offices;
- Creation of Arab-Tamazigh radio in Morocco;
- Support to establishing community multimedia centres and multilingual radio and TV stations, web and video projects, especially in Asia and Latin America;
- Digitization of Thai script for minorities in northwest Viet Nam;
- Creation of a Human Rights digital library in Kazakhstan and a digital library of representative works of Arab literature;
- Creation of an online portal devoted to Maghreb cultural heritage.



2008 - International Year of Languages



A VIRTUAL CORNUCOPIA

The Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems and Languages (EOLSS) is a virtual library equivalent to 235 printed volumes, with contributions focusing on all aspects of sustainable development, from environmental issues to language and culture. Coordinated and funded by Eolss Publishers, with support from UNESCO's Science Sector, the EOLSS involves thousands of authors from 100 countries. It includes more than 100 articles on linguistic anthropology, multilingualism and language planning, and on how to document endangered languages and maintain language diversity. It is available online at www.eolss.net.

DIGITAL SOLUTIONS TO THE LANGUAGE DIVIDE

The *Asian Multilingual Thesaurus of Geosciences (AMTG)* was created within the framework of the South-East Asian Network for a Geological Information System (SANGIS) to respond to regional difficulties in using keywords in English for geological and geophysical information management. SANGIS, which is coordinated by the UNESCO Jakarta Office, is a project designed to upgrade and harmonize existing digital data management systems for better information access and exchange and to create an effective regional geoscientific network. The AMTG's 5,867 geoscientific terms in English and French have been translated into Khmer, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Malaysian, Thai and Vietnamese. The Thesaurus exists in CD-ROM and printed format, and an electronic file can be downloaded free of charge at the following website: <http://ccop.or.th/amtg>.

06

SCIENCE Building bridges of knowledge

THERE ARE THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE SCIENCE SECTOR'S WORK WITH LANGUAGES.

Firstly, to enhance communication and collaboration between scientific researchers and institutions across linguistic divides. Secondly, to translate and disseminate scientific materials to communities for whom language barriers can make access to and participation in research difficult. And thirdly, to recognize that vernacular languages may be central to indigenous ways of knowing and are consequently the bridge that allows communication between science and indigenous and local knowledge systems.

Communication among researchers

The impact of languages on the scientific community is often overlooked. Yet attention to linguistic differences is essential to ensure the free flow of ideas and knowledge among researchers across the world. As the English language increasingly tends to dominate scientific discourse, national or local languages and dialects are sidelined. This reduces the flow of ideas and scientific enquiry and results in a loss of opportunities for international dialogue and mutual understanding.

Transmission of research findings

The ability to transmit scientific research findings to policy-makers and the public is essential for building true knowledge societies. However, reliance on dominant languages greatly reduces access to this knowledge for many, isolating them from the benefits of scientific data and preventing them from making informed decisions about research in their localities. The Science Sector therefore works to translate and widely disseminate scientific findings into national, vernacular or indigenous languages.

The role of vernacular, indigenous and local languages

UNESCO launched the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme in 2002. Contributing to the Millennium Development Goals of poverty eradication and environmental sustainability, the programme aims to empower local and indigenous peoples by advocating full recognition of their unique knowledge, know-how and practices, including their languages. Now managed by the Science Sector, LINKS promotes recognition of the importance of local and indigenous languages for community-based management of plants, animals and other resources and



SOME PROPOSED AREAS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008:

- ↳ Translation of scientific materials into official UN languages or other languages.
- ↳ Programmes to encourage and facilitate scientific collaboration across linguistic divides.
- ↳ Indigenous knowledge, languages and climate change.
- ↳ Indigenous languages and medicine.

for sustainable development. It also supports inter-generational transmission of knowledge. For example, it encourages mother-tongue bilingual education, and works to develop publications and pedagogical materials in indigenous languages whenever appropriate. LINKS also explores pathways to balance community-based knowledge with global knowledge acquired in formal and non-formal education.

ACTIVITIES LIST

Building a more sustainable future: selected LINKS activities

Some examples of the power of languages and multilingualism to open doors for knowledge sharing and a more sustainable future:

- *Reef and Rainforest: An Environmental Encyclopedia of Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands* (2005). This compendium provides meticulous documentation of Solomon Islander knowledge of reef and land topography, and of marine and terrestrial animals and plants. Containing more than 1,200 Marovo terms with descriptions in both Marovo and English, it can be used in local schools and for dialogue between scientists and the Marovo peoples. It also provides indexes in Hoava and Vanunu, and scientific taxonomic equivalents.
- *Dream Trackers – Yapa Art and Knowledge of the Australian Desert*. This interactive multimedia CD-ROM, entirely in the Walpiri (Aboriginal) language (with texts also in English and French), uses new information and communication technologies to convey traditional knowledge to young people (2000).
- *The Canoe is the People: Indigenous Navigation in the Pacific* (2005). A Maori language version of this CD-ROM, developed in collaboration with Waikato University, was launched in 2007. A Learning Resource Pack, with teacher manual and student workbooks for use in Pacific curricula, is also in development.
- The Bilingual Nature Trail Guidebooks of the south Surin Islands (Thailand) provide traditional terms used by the indigenous Moken people for plants, as well as information in both Thai and English.
- Publications based on indigenous knowledge in vernacular languages are also being developed with the Mapuche Pewenche (Chile) and the Mayangana of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve (Nicaragua).



2008 - International Year of Languages



07 SOCIAL & HUMAN SCIENCES Exploring the language dimension of social development and human rights

THE MOST PROGRAMME AND ITS CLEARING HOUSE ON LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

The Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme seeks to transfer social sciences research findings and data to decision-makers and other stakeholders, thereby creating effective links between research, policy and practice.

The MOST Programme was launched in March 1994, with a strong commitment to comparative, international, interdisciplinary and policy-relevant research. It also promotes international research networks, capacity-building and the establishment of a social science clearing house of knowledge.

Clearing House on Linguistic Rights:

To raise awareness about linguistic rights and to provide tools for decision-makers in governments, parliaments, and civil society, the MOST Programme has collected the most relevant provisions in international conventions, declarations and multilateral treaties, as well as constitutional provisions, which pertain to linguistic rights. This information can be used for legal analysis and the development of multicultural policies aimed at resolving and avoiding language conflict.

The MOST Programme's Clearing House on Linguistic Rights also provides an extensive list of links and resources for many research institutions, international organizations, networks, foundations, NGOs and databases that provide valuable information on language rights, language legislation and linguistic minorities worldwide (www.unesco.org/most/ln1.htm).

THE SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES SECTOR (SHS) IS CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS,

social change and philosophy. Languages are an important – although sometimes neglected – aspect of these issues, which is why UNESCO seeks to build awareness and understanding of their role.

In its work on languages and multilingualism, the Social and Human Sciences Sector adopts a human rights approach. It examines this link in light of major social transformations (e.g. international migration, increasing urbanization) and other critical social issues, such as exclusion and poverty. Language rights of minorities and other social groups are now acknowledged to be basic human rights and are widely recognized in international law, as are the rights of women and children. For example, the Declaration of Vienna of the World Conference on Human Rights (1993) affirms the right for "persons belonging to minorities to use their own language" (Article 19).

Promoting language policies for social justice, peace and democracy

The development of language policies that ensure balanced communication between different ethnic and social groups, is also a prerequisite for conflict resolution, peace and building democracy. The Social and Human Sciences Sector assists decision-makers in designing constitutional frameworks and multicultural policies to promote peaceful coexistence between ethnic and linguistic groups, to find mechanisms of power-sharing and intercultural communication and, and so be able to build democratic institutions and a democratic political culture.

Encouraging philosophical thought, intercultural debate and dialogue on languages

The Social and Human Sciences Sector fosters international debate and intercultural dialogue on the many different aspects of languages and multilingualism, including translation. For example, UNESCO's intersectoral strategy on philosophy (2006) has placed special emphasis on the importance of supporting the translation of philosophical works.

Supporting analysis, research, and dissemination of information

Another important research area includes comparative studies on how language and multilingualism policies and issues are affecting societies and in turn, how major



2008 - International Year of Languages



SOME PROPOSED AREAS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008:

- ↳ Languages and migration.
- ↳ Multilingualism and social integration.

social transformations are affecting language policies and linguistic diversity. These findings are available in print or electronically on the Sector's Internet website: <http://www.unesco.org/shs/shsdc/shscatalogueweb.pdf>

ACTIVITIES LIST

Many of the Sector's activities are linked to languages and multilingualism. Examples of representative projects and partners include:

- The MOST project "Democratic governance in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies", which is a democracy training project launched at the request of the Kyrgyz Government and organized in co-operation with the Swiss Government and the European Commission. It puts emphasis on developing strategies to manage ethnic conflict between different linguistic groups as a means of improving public policy (e.g. education, media, information technologies, labour market) and its implementation.
- The *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* (published by SHS), which provides a platform for research on migration, multiculturalism, and minority rights. Several issues of the journal have explored questions of language and multilingualism (e.g. "Language Rights as an Integral Part of Human Rights", 2001), and in 2004, a special thematic issue was dedicated to the use of languages on the Internet. The basic research for this issue was carried out as part of the B@bel Initiative.
- City Words, a joint SHS-CNRS (French National Scientific Research Centre) project, involving institutions covering 12 linguistic areas (Africa, Arab States region, China, Czech Republic, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Latin America, North America, Russian Federation and Spain). It looks at themes such as naming new urban areas, categorizing town and city by socio-linguistic registers, and traces the development of learned and technical vocabulary through a study of everyday contacts, circulation and exchanges of city words in the Mediterranean region.