

International Mother Language Day

21 February 2018

Concept Note

UNESCO has been celebrating International Mother Language Day for nearly 20 years now with the aim of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Linguistic diversity is increasingly threatened as more and more languages disappear. One language disappears on average every two weeks, taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage. Protecting linguistic diversity is a challenge.

With regard to multilingual education based on mother tongue or first language, progress is being made. Overall, there is a better perception of mother tongues, more commitment to their development in public life, and more measures taken to ensure mother tongue education in the early years of schooling.

On the occasion of International Mother Language Day 2018, UNESCO reiterates its commitment to linguistic diversity and invites its Member States to celebrate the day in as many languages as possible as a reminder that linguistic diversity and multilingualism are essential for sustainable development.

We live in multilingual and multicultural societies with multilingual citizens. We exist through our languages; it is through language we express ourselves, we communicate, we participate in social and public life, and we transmit traditional knowledge, knowledge and cultures in a sustainable way.

Languages are an irreplaceable tool for sustainability; each and every one conveys a different pattern of thoughts and worldviews. The realisation of sustainable development depends on linguistic diversity and multilingualism and the contribution it makes to global citizenship education as it promotes intercultural encounters and better ways of living together