

**INTER-AGENCY  
SUPPORT GROUP  
ON INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES' ISSUES**

**THEMATIC PAPER towards  
the preparation of the  
2014 World Conference on  
Indigenous Peoples**

**EDUCATION AND INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES: PRIORITIES FOR  
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

## **Thematic Paper on Education and Indigenous Peoples: Priorities for Inclusive Education**

The United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group (IASG) on Indigenous Issues aims to strengthen cooperation and coordination among UN agencies, funds, entities and programmes on indigenous peoples' issues and to support the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It also seeks to promote the effective participation of indigenous peoples in relevant international processes.

At its annual meeting held in October 2013, the IASG decided to develop a set of collaborative thematic papers to serve as background information and analysis on key issues to contribute to the process and preparations for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The preparation of each paper was led by one or more agencies with inputs from other IASG members. The papers do not present or represent formal, official UN policy positions. Rather, they reflect the collective efforts of the Inter-Agency Support Group to highlight selected key issues and to provide substantive materials to inform the Conference, with a view to contributing to the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples.

*\*The chair of the IASG rotates annually amongst the participating agencies. The Support Group has been chaired by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) until the end of the 13th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 2014. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is currently holding the chair of the Group. The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues acts as co-chair of the Support Group.*

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## Key messages

- ❖ Progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not benefitted all learners equally. While much has been achieved, marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, are being left behind.
- ❖ Indigenous learners tend to have less access to education, have to contend with poorer quality education, and do not enjoy the same benefits from education as non-indigenous learners.
- ❖ Efforts should be made to ensure that indigenous peoples have access to education that is culturally and linguistically appropriate and that does not aim at or result in unwanted assimilation.
- ❖ Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” To realize this right, indigenous peoples must be supported and empowered to take the lead in developing quality education systems.
- ❖ Mother language instruction is recommended for indigenous children, youth and adults. Where the indigenous language is not the mother language (i.e. where the language is not being transmitted), language revitalization programmes should be integrated into the education system.
- ❖ The educational attainment of indigenous women and girls often lags behind that of other segments of the population. Special priority must be given to ensuring that indigenous women and girls have access to and benefit from education.
- ❖ Although second chance, vocational training and adult literacy education programmes are often considered to be low priorities, they are an important element of inclusive education with many long-lasting benefits for indigenous peoples.

## Summary

Marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, face multiple barriers to education and are being left behind in terms of educational achievement. Developing tailored, culturally and linguistically appropriate educational programmes for indigenous learners should be a priority. The most effective way to do so is to work in a community-based, bottom-up manner to ensure that infrastructure, pedagogical materials and curricula meet the sometimes unique needs of indigenous teachers, learners and their communities. Although much work has been done along these lines, with the development of specially tailored school systems and pedagogical approaches, first or identity language instruction and reinforced indigenous knowledge content, these approaches require more support to be properly implemented in all countries where indigenous peoples live.

This paper briefly considers the current situation with reference to studies carried out on indigenous peoples' education in recent years before closing with a series of recommendations for consideration in the consultation process towards a post-2015 development agenda. Some of the relevant activities implemented or promoted by UNESCO and UNICEF are listed in Appendix I.

## Background and Analysis

Education is extremely important for indigenous children, youth and adults. As the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) points out:

“Education of indigenous children contributes to both individual and community development, as well as to participation in society in its broadest sense. Education enables indigenous children to exercise and enjoy economic, social and cultural rights, and strengthens their ability to exercise civil rights in order to influence political policy processes for improved protection of human rights. The implementation of indigenous peoples’ right to education is an essential means of achieving individual empowerment and self-determination. Education is also an important means for the enjoyment, maintenance and respect of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and traditional knowledge...Education is the primary means of ensuring indigenous peoples’ individual and collective development; it is a precondition for indigenous peoples’ ability to realize their right to self-determination, including their right to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development.”<sup>1</sup>

During the past 15 years, there have been great gains in both education--for instance through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) movement<sup>2</sup>--and indigenous peoples’ issues--for instance through the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, significant work remains to ensure that indigenous girls, boys, men, women, communities and societies fully enjoy the right to education, as recognized in a number of international human rights instruments, including the International Labour Organization Convention no. 169 (articles 26 to 31), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 29 and 30), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (articles 12, 13 and 14) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26). For more discussion of education for indigenous peoples as a human right see EMRIP (2009: 2-40); Champagne (2009); and National Model United Nations (2013).

Education is a significant initiator of development at the individual, community, national and global levels. For individuals, education is a lifelong asset and one of the most economically sound investments an individual can make. On average, each additional year of schooling translates into a 10% increase in an individual’s income and every average year of additional schooling translates into a 1% increase in a country’s GDP.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true for girls – a single year of secondary education correlates with as much as a 25% increase in wages later in life.<sup>4</sup> Education also has broader health and social benefits. Educated women marry later,<sup>5</sup> are less likely to die in child-birth,<sup>6</sup> and have fewer children, more of whom are likely to survive.<sup>7</sup> Individuals who have completed primary school are 50% more likely to vote in elections, and

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<sup>1</sup> EMRIP (2009: 4-5 and 25) in Champagne (2009)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the global Education for All movement and the Dakar Framework of Action, see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/>

<sup>3</sup> Hanusek and Woessman (2010)

<sup>4</sup> Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2002)

<sup>5</sup> Mathur, S., M.Greene and A. Malhotra (2003)

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2003)

<sup>7</sup> Gakidou, Cowling, Lozarno and Murray (2010)

education has also been shown to dramatically reduce the likelihood of civil war.<sup>8</sup> Education is also at the centre of efforts to address many of today's most critical global challenges including population growth, climate change, urbanisation and conflict.

However, it is important to emphasize that education for indigenous peoples must be culturally and linguistically appropriate otherwise it may reinforce and perpetuate their marginalization.<sup>9</sup> The UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights' (UN CESCR) in General Comment No. 13 on the Right to Education, reviewing specific legal obligations, asserts that states must: 'fulfil (facilitate) the acceptability of education by taking positive measures to ensure that education is culturally appropriate for minorities and indigenous peoples, and of good quality for all'.<sup>10</sup> The UN CESCR also explains that: 'education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings'.<sup>11</sup>

### **Reaching the Marginalised: Making education more inclusive for indigenous peoples**

Progress made in getting children into school was slower than many countries had anticipated during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, a turning point occurred in the year 2000 with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the accompanying MDGs – the second of which is to achieve universal primary education by 2015, and the third of which is to achieve gender parity at all levels of education by 2015. The MDGs galvanised the global community into action and are credited with ensuring an additional 52 million children were in school,<sup>12</sup> as well as making significant strides in reaching gender parity in schools.

Furthermore, according to the Final Evaluation of the Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD),<sup>13</sup> which ran from 2003 to 2012, the Decade witnessed a growing interest in meeting the learning needs of the marginalized, including indigenous peoples, through inclusive policies and interventions.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, in most countries, progress for marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, has not been as marked as for mainstream groups. Indeed, approximately half of children out of school in the world live in just 12 countries, eight of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>15</sup> However, even relatively prosperous countries still struggle to get that 'last 5%' or 'last 10%' of children into school, while a recent UNESCO study highlights the almost universal attainment gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous primary school students in five Latin American countries.<sup>16</sup> UNESCO's 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, subtitled

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<sup>8</sup> Mosselson et al (2009)

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO (2010b, pg. 25)

<sup>10</sup> UN CESCR (1999, para 50)

<sup>11</sup> UN CESCR (1999, para 7(d))

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO (2011, pp. 1 & 40)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/literacy/un-literacy-decade/unld-end-of-decade-assessment/>

<sup>14</sup> Marginalized groups include: 493 million illiterate adult females; over one billion people with disabilities; some 1.22 billion people living in extreme poverty; an estimated 34.0 million people living with HIV; almost half of 57 million out-of-school children of primary school age in conflict-affected and fragile states; and an estimated 300 to 350 million indigenous people.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO (2012). The countries are: Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, India, the Philippines, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Kenya, Yemen, Mali, and South Africa

<sup>16</sup> Trevion et al. (in prep)

*“Reaching the Marginalized”*<sup>17</sup>, highlights this issue and concludes that “reaching those who are being left behind as a result of disparities linked to poverty, gender, ethnicity, language and other markers of disadvantage should be established as a first order of priority.”<sup>18</sup>

In part, this is because barriers to education that impact differentially upon indigenous peoples have not been adequately tackled. Children from poor communities, ethnic minority groups and indigenous peoples face three main barriers. The first of these is lack of access. For children to receive an education there must be a school within safe travelling distance, with teachers and pedagogical materials. In many countries, this is often not the case, especially for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples who tend to live in remote areas or who move around. The second barrier is the poor quality of the education provided. Children from the poorest communities often have inferior educational institutions than those from richer communities. Children from ethnic minorities may be denied the opportunity to learn in their own language and their curricula and educational materials may be grounded in an alien culture. They may even be faced with social stigmatization. The third barrier is relatively poor outcomes. Children from ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples do not enjoy the same benefits from education as other children. They find it harder to get jobs, and their education often does not lead to significant contributions to life in their community.

The Deprivation and Marginilization in Education (DME) dataset<sup>19</sup> has also highlighted the fact that multiple risk factors of deprivation are additive: “Gender, poverty, language and culture often combine to radically heighten the risk of being left far behind.”<sup>20</sup> A number of studies have shown that indigenous girls may be less likely to participate in and benefit from education than indigenous boys or non-indigenous girls, while poor indigenous girls are at the most risk of all. For instance, in Nigeria, 97% of poor Hausa-speaking girls have fewer than two years of education. In Paraguay, only 16.8% of indigenous girls aged 15-19 had completed primary school in 2002, compared to 25.6% of indigenous boys and 83.7% of non-indigenous girls.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the studies on educational attainment focus on basic, primary and secondary education. UNESCO’s 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report also emphasized the importance of ensuring second chance and vocational education for increasing the inclusivity of education systems for marginalized adults. A number of studies have shown that indigenous peoples often register lower levels of adult literacy rates than the majority groups.<sup>22 23</sup> Improving adult’s literacy skills have many positive economic, social and even health impacts, and may even improve their children’s education.<sup>24</sup>

While some countries have made impressive efforts to tackle these barriers and extend educational opportunities to the most marginalized, action has fallen short of EFA goals and much work is still to be done.

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<sup>17</sup> UNESCO (2010a)

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO (2010b, pg. 271)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/GMR/html/dme-1.html>

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO (2010b, pg. 24)

<sup>21</sup> Champagne (2009, pg. 137)

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO (2010b, pg. 18)

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO (2012, pg. 101)

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO (2012, pg. 102)



## **Indigenous Peoples and Education: increased awareness at the global level**

For the past 15 years, indigenous peoples have gained more visibility and their situation has been better addressed by UN agencies, most demonstrably through the adoption in 2007 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the issuance in 2008 of the UNDG Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, which identifies education as one of eight key issues that UNCTs should address when programming.<sup>25</sup>

UNESCO and UNICEF are working to improve education for indigenous peoples through a range of projects and initiatives. For instance, UNESCO published the book *The Challenge of Indigenous Education: Practice and Perspectives*,<sup>26</sup> which identifies the emerging opportunities for quality indigenous education through an evolving intergovernmental policy framework. It notes that in all too many situations implementation lags behind what was hoped for when the policies were put in place; and highlights examples of good practice that can be used for putting in place such programmes. As the case studies in the volume make clear, the challenge of developing education programmes for indigenous peoples is multifaceted and complex. Nevertheless, insufficient progress has made towards the realization of the recommendations made in 2004. One key lesson to be learned is that each indigenous people and each region must develop unique programmes that reflect their unique languages, world views, cultures, livelihoods and histories.

## **Culturally Appropriate Education for Indigenous peoples: Some examples of good practice**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes the primary importance of culture. Under the CRC, states have an obligation to preserve and protect the child's cultural identity, as an essential element for his or her development. The Preamble recognizes the 'importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child'. Articles 8, 20 and 30 all touch on the right of children to their cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic identity. While, it is thus well-acknowledged within the international framework that culture is a key element for the development of the child, the translation of these norms into culturally appropriate education systems remains a challenge for many countries. It may be helpful, therefore, to highlight several examples of good practice.

Active and multicultural pedagogical methodologies offer tools for improving access to quality education for indigenous peoples. In Latin America, both UNICEF and UNESCO promote the Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) approach. UNICEF's work has focused on the promotion of both the children's mother tongue and the national language. Although both languages are equally included in the curriculum, the modality and the weight of each language use may vary. Typically, the literacy process starts in the child's mother tongue, while the second language is gradually introduced, so that writing skills are learned just once. Later the child transfers what she or he has already learned to the other language. Education should also take into consideration the content, values and knowledge of indigenous cultures as well as those of the rest of society. In this way, indigenous languages and cultures become important pedagogical resources.

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<sup>25</sup> UNDG (2008: 22)

<sup>26</sup> King and Schielmann (2004)

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift regarding intercultural education. Initially, it was often associated with bilingual education for indigenous children. But it is now considered a modality for the entire educational system, not only for indigenous groups. “Intercultural Education for ALL” has been the new trend for educational debates and legal reforms for this sector.

Evidence suggests that IBE has been successful.<sup>27</sup> Learning achievement evaluations show that children participating in IBE classes perform better than control groups, both in their first and second languages. For adolescents, cultural awareness proves to be a strong element for improving self-esteem. Through IBE programs, communities have been more involved in education activities, often in the planning and management of school action plans. The use of indigenous languages and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the curriculum have increased the interest of both families and students in their history, and in their present and future learning and development opportunities.

However, IBE programs are not without their flaws. Common problems include: unsatisfactory attainment in global curricula and national languages; additional challenges for poorly supported teachers in rural settings; lack of sustained and secure funding; difficulty recruiting appropriately qualified teachers; and lack of infrastructure. However, if these issues are overcome, IBE can be truly transformative for indigenous peoples, reinforcing their identity, language and traditional knowledge, while at the same time offering expanded options for success throughout life, thereby repaying any additional investment that may be required.

The “Observer, réfléchir, agir” (Observe, think, act) (ORA) teaching method is a bilingual and intercultural education method<sup>28</sup> originally developed by educators working with the Baka people of Cameroon.<sup>29 30</sup> Sometimes called the “mommy method” because it follows a similar method used by the Baka when they learn in the forest and because it is used in the mother language,<sup>31</sup> the method has been adapted to other cultural contexts in Central Africa, particularly as a means of improving learning outcomes for early childhood education and supporting indigenous children to acquire the basic skills they will require to be successful in primary education.

In some cases, for instance in the Pacific or the Arctic, the use of Open Educational Resources<sup>32</sup> can help to overcome geographical and infrastructural barriers to provide appropriate educational materials to indigenous peoples.

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<sup>27</sup> López and Hanemann, eds. (2009)

<sup>28</sup> For instance, see [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E\\_C19\\_2011\\_7.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E_C19_2011_7.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Messe, V. (2008)

<sup>30</sup> Manga Ndjie Bindzi Mballa, H. (2009)

<sup>31</sup> Messe, V. (2008, pg. 28)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/open-educational-resources/>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past decade or so, important lessons have been learnt about improving outcomes for indigenous peoples in the educational sphere. Many of these lessons are captured in the recommendations made by EMRIP in their 2009 report on the right of indigenous peoples to education (EMRIP 2009: 25-28) and the chapter on education in the 2010 publication “State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples” (Champagne 2009: 143-147). This report fully supports the recommendations made in these two documents, in particular:

- ❖ Mother language instruction is recommended for indigenous children, youth and adults. Children learn best in their mother tongue. However evident this may appear, there are still many countries where, by law, all education must take place in the national language. Children who don’t speak that language are at a significant disadvantage from their very first day in school.
- ❖ Many indigenous languages are endangered or on the verge of extinction. Where the indigenous language is not the mother language (i.e. where the identity or heritage language is not being transmitted from generation to generation), language revitalization programmes should be integrated into the education system.
- ❖ Formal education should not only teach about the outside world, but should also support and value traditional knowledge, culture, livelihoods, world views and pedagogical methods. To do this appropriately, infrastructure, curricula and pedagogical materials should be tailored to the unique needs of indigenous learners, communities and peoples. This may include modified schedules, distance learning initiatives, mobile schools and culturally and linguistically appropriate pedagogical materials.
- ❖ In line with UNDRIP, article 14, indigenous peoples should identify their own educational priorities and curriculum and pedagogical material development, teacher training and education delivery should be planned and implemented with the active involvement of the indigenous community.
- ❖ Active, hands-on pedagogical methods which involve the whole community are often most effective with indigenous learners and more appropriate for transmitting traditional knowledge. Active learning approaches such as ORA should be encouraged.
- ❖ Earmarked funding is required to ensure the delivery of quality education for indigenous peoples.
- ❖ An emphasis should be placed on capacity-building for teachers, including that they are able to teach in the mother- or ethnic- language of the students, that they are prepared for and understand the importance of involving the community in formal education and that they understand and work to the strengths of their learners. This includes ensuring professional-scale remuneration on par with teachers in non-indigenous communities.
- ❖ National curricula and materials should also be intercultural, and should include accurate information about indigenous peoples, their cultures, their histories and lived experience.

Negative and discriminatory stereotypes should be removed from the curricula and materials of all schools and educational institutes, not just those of indigenous learners.

- ❖ To enable full understanding of the education gap and the barriers to education faced by indigenous learners, accurate monitoring and disaggregated data is required.
- ❖ Second chance programmes, adult literacy courses and vocational training are crucially important to ensuring that indigenous learners fully benefit from education and fully participate in public life.

In the push for Education for All, improving access, quality and outcomes for marginalized populations, including indigenous peoples, must not be overlooked. To not leave out indigenous learners, education must be tailored to their needs, including their geographical, infrastructural, livelihood, cultural, historical and linguistic contexts. It is also necessary to highlight that educational marginalization for indigenous peoples occurs within a context of disproportionately high poverty and hunger, decreased security, and loss of identity, language, territories and livelihoods. An attention to all the rights of indigenous peoples and support for sustainable economic, cultural and social development is fundamental to improving their educational outcomes.

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## Appendix

### Indigenous Education Programmes Implemented by UNESCO and UNICEF

- The UNESCO Participation Programme for Member States gives financial support to small projects related to mother tongue development and material elaboration. This programme has so far benefitted Indigenous peoples in Swaziland, Palau, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, amongst others.

### Indigenous education in Latin America

- In 2009, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL) issued the publication, *Literacy and Multiculturality: Latin American Perspectives*<sup>33</sup>, which provides an analysis of and recommendations for literacy learning for indigenous youth and adults in multicultural and multilingual contexts. The publication is based on seven studies on the topic carried out in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru in 2007-2008 to mark the UN's International Year of Languages (2008). The studies focus on analysing intercultural and bilingual learning opportunities with an intercultural and right-based approach. They argue that it is important to take into account the full richness of indigenous knowledge and belief systems, as well as social structures and livelihoods when developing programmes to tackle illiteracy in Latin American indigenous communities. For instance, many indigenous societies have methods of knowledge transmission which emphasize learning through direct observation and participation, rather than rote learning or concept-based instruction. These forms of learning are intricately connected with fundamental principles of the particular society; hence they should be integrated into appropriate pedagogical methods. Therefore, the learning experience "not only appeals to [the learner's] reason, but also their mood, taste, emotion and sensitivity. Because, after all, it is believed that one learns with the heart, too." (2010: 422).
- In 2013, UNESCO will publish the findings of an email consultation on early childhood care education (ECCE) and mother-language instruction. Responses pertaining to indigenous education in the Amazon region of South America have informed UNESCO's work on IBE.
- UNESCO's demonstration project with the Mayangna people of Nicaragua puts these concepts into practice. The Autonomous Regions of Nicaragua, where many of the country's indigenous peoples live, has developed an education curriculum within an IBE framework that allows for indigenous groups to adapt a certain proportion of the curriculum to their own cultural context and lived reality. This has created an opportunity to work at a community level to develop lesson plans and pedagogical materials that are based on and reinforce Mayangna traditional knowledge. UNESCO has been working in collaboration with Mayangna experts, community members and the Nicaragua Ministry of Education to develop classroom materials in the Mayangna language that teach Mayangna knowledge of the environment in Mayangna schools. By focusing on the strengths and capabilities of Mayangna experts and professionals to reinforce their

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<sup>33</sup> López and Hanemann, eds. (2009)

greatest assets--their communities, knowledge, culture and livelihood skills-- this project not only provides classroom activities, but also builds social and cultural capital in Mayangna communities, which in turn can help those communities respond to other challenges more effectively. Early results have been positive with students reporting enthusiasm for lessons and rapid comprehension of learning points. The teachers are acquiring new, active learning techniques and community leaders and parents report feeling pride, increased community cohesion and a sense of empowerment.

- The UNESCO chair programme supports higher education research units which research particular issues, usually from an interdisciplinary perspective.<sup>34</sup> Two UNESCO chairs have been set up to look at indigenous issues: the UNESCO Chair on the indigenous peoples of Latin America, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador; and the UNESCO Chair “The application of linguistic technologies to education in indigenous populations”, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), Spain, which focuses particularly on Nahuatl and Quechua language education.

### Indigenous Education in Africa

- Through its activities related to the strengthening of national capacities to develop and implement teacher policies, with particular emphasis on quality and gender issues, the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa (IICBA) will issue a publication in the series *Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development*.<sup>35</sup> “Developing Teachers and Caregivers for Indigenous Early Childhood Care and Education in Africa”. As outlined in the forthcoming publication, IICBA promotes the adaptation of ECCE to the cultural, social and livelihood context of indigenous children. This is not just a matter of plucking a practice from one culture and inserting it into a foreign context, but rather ensuring that the entire programme and curriculum are adapted to the child’s cultural background, environment, beliefs and practices. It is also crucial that ECCE recognize and incorporate knowledge transmission techniques from the child’s own culture and language. These can aid the development of creativity, abstract thinking, imagination and problem-solving skills. The publication therefore advocates working together with teachers and experts from the relevant ethnicity and who are conversant with the language norms and socio-cultural and political values to develop a model of ECCE that runs parallel to existing ECCE systems and is specially adapted not only to enhance indigenous children’s mother language, culture and traditional knowledge, but also to enhance learning outcomes at the foundational levels. Seven modules on indigenous ECCE have been developed in collaboration with ECCE experts in 11 African countries.
- In Namibia, UNESCO hosted the conference, “Indigenous Education in a Changing World”, which considered the persistent gaps that indigenous San people experience in educational access, quality and outcomes. The conference recommended, among other things, that effective approaches are community-based and tailored to the linguistic, cultural, livelihood and epistemological realities of San students.
- In parts of Central Africa, UNICEF is supporting training courses on the ORA method. In the Congo, UNICEF supports a project in which schools provide a two-year programme in the local indigenous language, as well as French classes. Teachers are indigenous

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<sup>34</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/unitwin-unesco-chairs-programme>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.eng.unesco-iicba.org/publications>



persons, school hours are adapted to the local life habits of the indigenous peoples, and schools are located within reach of indigenous communities. The introduction of the ORA method has shown that a preparatory bilingual education cycle can assist indigenous children in acquiring basic skills and prepare them for mainstream schooling.

### **Indigenous Education in Asia, the Pacific and other regions**

- In Asia and the Pacific region, indigenous communities are one of the most marginalized and unreached communities. UNESCO's Bangkok office, in collaboration with strong regional partnerships, has enhanced understanding of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) and has fostered supportive policy environments for institutionalizing MTB MLE under the framework of inclusive education. UNESCO Bangkok has published several advocacy materials including its *Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded*<sup>36</sup> and has co-hosted series of international conferences on language and education to build capacity of member states to effectively implement MLE programmes.
- In many rural communities, traditional knowledge of the environment, the land and natural resources is the basis upon which indigenous peoples gain their livelihoods. Integrating this knowledge into the formal education system in such a way as to ensure continued transmission of this knowledge and sustainable use of the resources without stripping the knowledge of many of the dynamic, symbolic and culturally embedded elements that make it unique has been an on-going challenge for educators. Working in partnership with the Ministry of Education of the Solomon Islands, with teachers, students and community members in the Marovo Lagoon, UNESCO seeks to manage indigenous knowledge in the form of a dynamic, Open Educational Resource (OER). The objective of the project is not to implement classical environmental awareness programs in schools but to redesign content across the curriculum to incorporate knowledge systems which are seriously endangered today. Hence, the project serves as a practical demonstration and testing of the role of educational material in indigenous languages for fostering the transmission and development of indigenous environmental knowledge through dialogue across generations. In this project, students, teachers and community members are actively involved in adding data, commenting on source material and developing new lesson plans. This project thereby seeks to bridge generations, knowledges, languages and places by carrying out assignments of indigenous environmental knowledge documentation in their mother language as part of their ongoing school work.
- Within the framework of the Open Educational Resources, the UNESCO Institute for International Technology Education (IITE) developed the project entitled "A Networked System of Open Indigenous Knowledge Resources for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in Polar Regions", in which pedagogical resources on traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples raise awareness of indigenous approaches to adaptation to environmental changes and promote ICT-enhanced education for sustainable development. Traditional knowledge of the peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East is presented in five multimedia modules.

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<sup>36</sup> UNESCO Bangkok (2007)