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SPECIAL ISSUE: *Endangered Languages*

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◆ Over 50% of the world's 6700 languages are seriously endangered and liable to be lost within 1 to 4 generations.

◆ 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 4% of the world's population.

◆ Half of all languages occur in just 8 countries: Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Nigeria, India, Mexico, Cameroon, Australia and Brazil.

*The world is a mosaic of visions and each vision is encapsulated by a language. Every time a language is lost, one vision of the world disappears.*

David Crystal, outstanding linguist

All figures given in this *Messenger* are approximate and open to debate.

*Bunuba, an Australian Aboriginal language, has no more than 100 speakers left, most of whom are older people. The Bunuba elders try to pass on the ancestral language through telling stories as it was done in the past.*

## Language Matters

Rieks Smeets, Intangible Heritage Section

This special issue of the *Messenger* is devoted to UNESCO's Endangered Languages Programme, one of the main activities of the Intangible Heritage Section. In addition to furthering the goals of the 2003 Convention, this programme constitutes an integral part of UNESCO's newly created intersectoral initiative for languages.

Language as we know it, probably developed no more than 150,000 years ago in East Africa and subsequently proliferated around the planet. Experts agree that several millennia ago the number of languages worldwide was considerably higher than the generally accepted estimate of 6,700 languages that are believed to exist today. Over the last centuries, the number of languages has been significantly decreasing due to the economic and cultural expansion of a few dominant countries, the resulting primacy of their languages and to nation-state building. In recent decades, this decrease has accelerated markedly as a result of modernization and rampant globalization.

Why does language matter? As humankind's principal means of communication, languages do not merely convey messages; they also express emotions, intentions and values, confirm social relations and transmit cultural and social expressions and practices. In spoken or written form, or through gesture, languages are the vehicle of memories, traditions, knowledge and skills. Consequently, language constitutes

a determining factor of identity for individuals and groups. The preservation of the linguistic diversity of the world's societies contributes to cultural diversity, which UNESCO considers a universal ethical imperative and essential for sustainable development in today's ever more globalizing world.

Should all languages be saved? As living entities, languages are in continuous flux: they develop, split, merge and sometimes die. The disappearance of a language may often be viewed as a natural phenomenon. Languages have always interacted and influenced each other as is also testified to by the prevalence of bi- and multilingualism in many regions around the globe. In principle, all languages, including sign languages, are equal: some have larger lexicons, others may boast long literary traditions, but, each language is equipped to fully cover communicative and related needs of its speakers and to embrace new developments. It follows that no one language is best suited to function as a dominant language. Writing systems can be designed, lexicons enlarged and keyboards developed for every language. Ultimately, saving languages is a matter of political will, policies, planning, and funding.

Clearly, not all languages can be safeguarded. Contemporary societies are becoming increasingly interconnected; borders and distances are dwindling, *(continued on last page)*



Right, *Kadazandusun* is spoken by about 300,000 people in Sabah, Malaysia. Alarmed by the rapid decline of the language, the community took action by establishing a Language Center and regular language classes.



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Above, The speakers of Toba number about 15,000 in Argentina. The Toba culture is rich with tradition and knowledge of nature passed on from generation to generation through stories and songs.



### Surveying Indigenous Language Vitality

The *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005*, prepared by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at the request of the Australian Government, provides an analysis of the situation of Australian indigenous languages based on UNESCO's nine Language Vitality factors (see the graph). Among its most significant findings, the report determined that only 145 of Australia's more than 250 known indigenous languages continue actually to be spoken. In addition, approximately 110 of them have been classified as severely or critically endangered. Only 18 indigenous languages are described as "strong" according to such a crucial factor as intergenerational transmission.

For the full text of the Australian survey report: [www.dcitia.gov.au/indig/maintenance\\_indigenous\\_languages/publications](http://www.dcitia.gov.au/indig/maintenance_indigenous_languages/publications)

## Endangered Languages and UNESCO

### A programme aimed at safeguarding linguistic heritage and diversity

Although a few forward-looking linguists attempted to alert the general public to language endangerment as early as the 1970s, only recently has the subject attracted serious international attention. In the early 1990s, special studies and conferences began addressing the issue, and programmes aimed at reversing the tide soon followed. UNESCO joined these efforts in 1993 when the Organization's Intangible Heritage Section launched 'The Red Book of Languages in Danger of Disappearing' project, and the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages at Tokyo University in 1995. The following year, UNESCO published the first edition of the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (see p. 8 for full details).

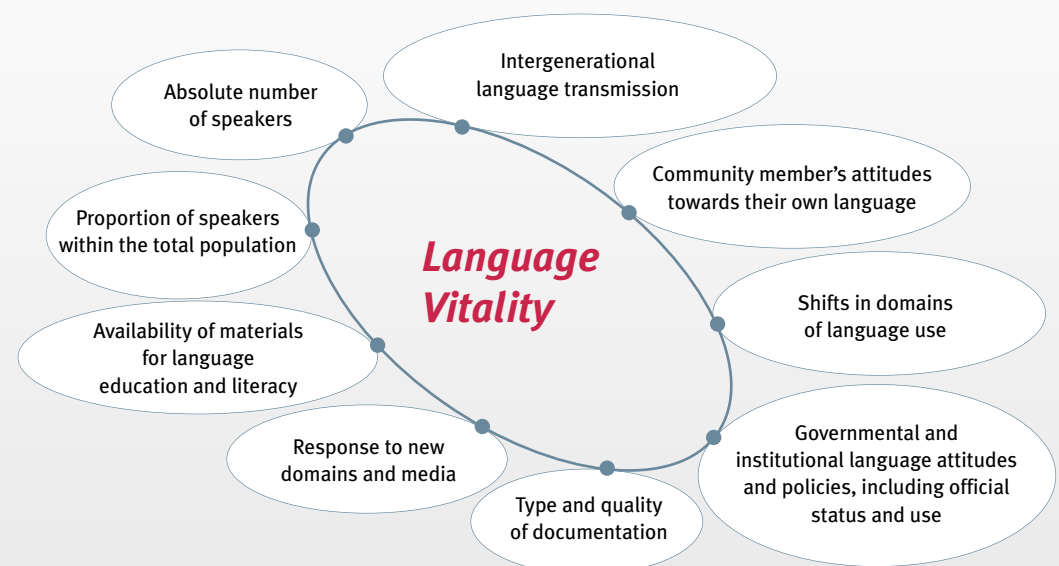
For further information: <http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook>

In the framework of UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Section, the Endangered Languages Programme aims to contribute to the promotion and protection of linguistic diversity throughout the world by:

- ♦ raising awareness on language endangerment through publications and media;
- ♦ strengthening and promoting local initiatives for developing writing systems and documenting previously non-written languages;
- ♦ ensuring the participation of speaker communities in activities related to the safeguarding or revitalization of their languages;
- ♦ identifying and disseminating good practices in language preservation;
- ♦ mobilizing international cooperation through expert meetings and networks.

### A Methodology for Assessing Language Endangerment

In order to be able to decide on appropriate safeguarding measures, one must first define what an endangered language is and to what degree it is endangered. In 2002 and 2003, UNESCO asked an international group of linguists to develop a framework for determining the vitality of a language. This Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages elaborated a landmark concept paper entitled "Language Vitality and Endangerment", which established the following nine criteria:



No single factor is sufficient to assess the state of a community's language. However, taken together, these nine factors can determine the viability of a language, its function in society and the type of measures required for its maintenance or revitalization.

For the full text of the concept paper: [www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/languagevitality](http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/languagevitality)



## Focus on the Convention

### The 2003 Convention recognizes language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH)

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which entered into force on 20 April 2006, was conceived to safeguard the living heritage of humanity while promoting human creativity and cultural diversity, as well as the well-being of the groups and communities who bear the practices and expressions making up this heritage.

Although the authors of the Convention undoubtedly considered language a major component of ICH, the legal instrument does not provide for the safeguarding of languages per se. Indeed, according to the definition given in Article 2, the non-restrictive list of ICH domains includes “oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage”. Thus, the Convention recognizes the essential role of language in the expression and transmission of the ICH. In fact, all ICH domains – from knowledge about the universe to rituals and handicrafts – depend on language for their day-to-day practice and inter-generational transmission. Furthermore, identity-forming experiences of communities and groups are reflected in the lexicon of their languages. One of the domains specified in the Convention – that of oral traditions and expressions – depends on language not only for its transmission and enactment, but also for its very content.

The subject of language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage, and in particular of oral traditions and expressions, was extensively discussed at an expert meeting organized in January 2006 for the purpose of outlining a future *Manual on Safeguarding Oral Traditions and Expressions*. Scheduled to be published in 2007, this practical guide will be the first of a series of domain-specific manuals designed to assist States Parties to the Convention and other States, community members and NGOs in developing and implementing safeguarding measures and activities in the spirit of the 2003 Convention.



Two photos above, *The Hudhud chants, Masterpiece proclaimed in 2001, are again learned by children of the Ifugao community in special Hudhud schools.*

## The Hudhud Chants of the Ifugao

The Hudhud is a 700-year-old oral tradition narrated and chanted by the Ifugao community of northern Luzon during the sowing season, the rice harvest and at funeral wakes. A complete recitation, lasting for several days, is generally conducted by an elderly woman who acts as the community’s historian and preacher. At present, the Hudhud is in danger of disappearing; few of the remaining narrators are familiar with the entire repertory, and written sources are scarce due to the difficulty of transcribing Hudhud.

In 2001, the Hudhud chants were proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. A project launched by UNESCO in 2003 with the financial support of the Japanese Government aims at ensuring the transmission of the Hudhud to new generations of practitioners. In addition to being taught in special Hudhud schools within the Ifugao community, the tradition is now included in provincial school curricula. Furthermore, chanting competitions are held to promote the Hudhud among the general public. The project activities also include the collection, documentation and recording of the Hudhud.

*The art of Akyns, the Kyrgyz epic tellers – Masterpiece proclaimed in 2003 – continues to be transmitted to young apprentices. The pre-eminent Kyrgyz epic is the rich 1000-year-old Manas trilogy, recounting the exploits of Manas and his descendants and followers.*

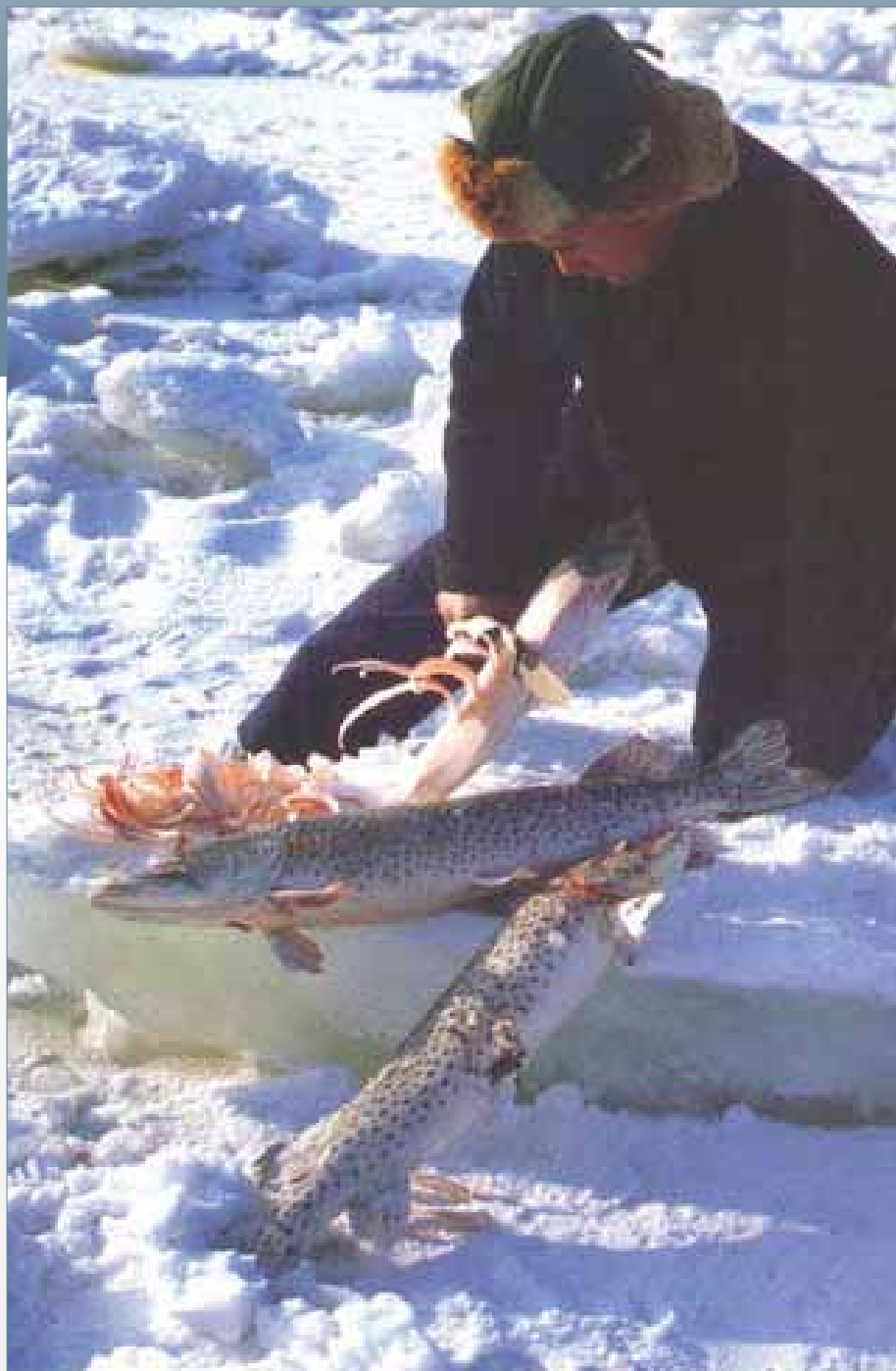
# In the field

## Highlights of the projects and activities coordinated by the Intangible Heritage Section in favour of endangered languages

### From spoken to written languages

The speakers of Bembele and Gbete, two minority languages of the Niger-Congo family spoken in the Bertoua region of South-West Cameroon, could make use of their languages only in restricted domains as the languages had no writing system. Thanks to a documentation project developed by the NACALCO Center for Applied Linguistics in Yaounde, two young Cameroonian linguists, in close cooperation with the speakers, established writing principles and produced reference materials (orthography guides, teaching manuals, word lists, etc.) for the two languages to be used in literacy classes, bilingual and adult education and in written media. The linguists also trained community members as language assistants and future teachers in literacy classes. Thanks to the new materials and the training, the speakers are now able to take over the project and organize language teaching in their community.

© IEA, CASS



*There are only about 20 elderly Hezhen speakers left in the Heilongjiang Province of China. Due to longstanding contacts with the dominant language Mandarin, the Hezhen language spoken today is a mixture of Hezhen and Mandarin.*

### Supporting Chinese efforts to safeguard minority languages

Officially, China counts 56 ethnic groups and over 120 living languages, ranging from Mandarin with nearly 1 billion speakers and about 100 dialects, to Hezhen with only about 20 speakers. From 2002 to 2005, UNESCO's Beijing Office has supported the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to carry out recording and research on eight endangered ethnic minority languages in China: Manchu, She, Lakkia, Tujia, Western Yugur, Anong, Hezhen and Ersu. For each language, experts developed basic documentation (dictionaries, grammars, etc.) and teaching materials to facilitate the use of the languages in education. The project also resulted in the creation of an audiovisual archive for the use of anthropologists and linguists.

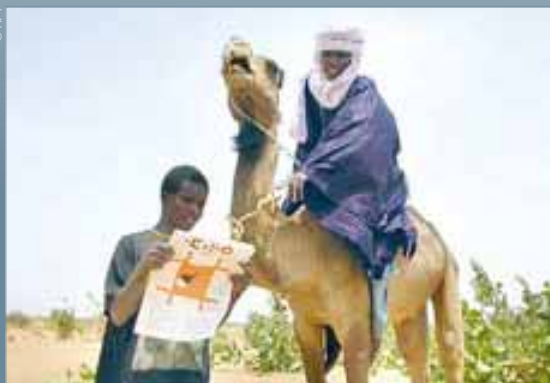
Contact: UNESCO Beijing Office, Beatrice Kaldun, b.kaldun@unesco.org



*In a village in South-West Cameroon, a woman speaking Bembele learns to read and write her own language. This has been made possible thanks to basic language documentation and the development of language materials.*



Left, In a community work shop organized by linguists from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in Honiara, Solomon Islands, speakers of minority languages learn how to document their own languages in order to prepare them for wider use.



## Safeguarding the Pacific's tremendous linguistic diversity

Over 2000 languages are found in the Greater Pacific area, most of them non-written. Between 2000 and 2003, the first phase of a language revitalization project was carried out in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji on documenting unwritten languages such as Zia, Sare, Tape, Naman and Nese. The research activities focused on creating basic documentation and language materials to facilitate wider use of these community languages, especially in formal and non-formal education. The project received enthusiastic support from all speaker communities who actively engaged in the language documentation work. Thanks to the project's encouraging results, the Japanese Government decided to fund a second phase in 2006/2007 focusing on 12 languages of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The project will continue to concentrate on local capacity-building: native-speaker students and field workers will be trained in language documentation to ensure the sustainability of the project's activities.

## Partnership between UNESCO, Discovery Communications, Inc. and UN Works Programme

Aware of television's tremendous potential to disseminate information to hundreds of millions of people worldwide, the Intangible Heritage Section entered into a partnership with the American global media company, Discovery Communications, Inc., for the production of documentary films featuring communities speaking endangered languages. In 2003 and 2004, eighteen short films were produced and broadcast internationally on Discovery Channel in 160 countries. The films introduce the viewers to the challenges faced by people speaking endangered languages in Argentina, Canada, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, Croatia, Gabon, Guatemala, Lithuania, Panama and South Africa.

For further information:

[www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/discovery](http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/discovery)

## Reviving tifinagh, the ancient script of the Tuareg

Some two-thirds of the estimated 1.5 million Tuareg living in Niger use their traditional language, Tamajaq, on a daily basis. Although Tamajaq's ancient script, Tifinagh, continues to be transmitted, it is rarely used in Niger nowadays. From 2003 to 2006, UNESCO assisted the Association for the Promotion of Tifinagh (APT) in Agadez, Niger, in the publication of the bimonthly journal *Amanar*, various teaching materials and several booklets devoted to oral traditions and expressions. All of these reading materials were published in both Tamajaq with Tifinagh script and in French. 500 copies of each of the booklets were distributed in village libraries and schools and the journal was sold in the Tuareg communities of northern Niger. In addition, classes were organized in 2003 teaching about 2000 Tuareg the ancient script, which is still seen as an essential means for preserving Tuareg identity. The launching of the journal and the distribution of reading materials created great interest among Tuareg groups in Niger who to a large extent are now again able to actively use Tifinagh.

Top & below, The newspaper *Amanar* is distributed on camelback from village to village and from settlement to settlement to reach the Tuareg communities in the North of Niger. The newspaper is written in Tifinagh, the ancient script of the Tuareg, and in French.



## UNESCO Register of Good Practices in Language Preservation

Launched in 2006, this UNESCO initiative aims at compiling success stories in the field of language safeguarding and at providing innovative approaches, practical information and models for speaker communities worldwide. This database, which is scheduled to be available on-line by early 2007, will feature community-based projects in different countries and focus on a wide range of areas, such as education, revitalization, standardization, community development, awareness-raising, capacity-building, documentation and use of new technology.

For further information, or to submit a project:

[www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/goodpractices](http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/goodpractices)



**FEBRUARY 21 INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY**

*One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language.  
That is our country, our motherland – and no other.* E.M. CIORAN

FEBRUARY 21

International  
Mother Language Day

# In focus: Africa

## Endangered African languages at the heart of UNESCO's efforts

Over the last three decades, many African countries have made efforts to safeguard their national languages. Encouraging examples are to be found in South Africa where 11 official languages are used for administrative purposes, in the education system, in the media, etc. Ethiopia is currently implementing an ambitious policy using 22 Ethiopian languages in education, starting with the primary level. Despite such efforts, many African languages are seriously threatened, and concerted efforts are needed to develop appropriate language policies and safeguarding initiatives that promote multilingualism and the preservation of as many African languages as possible. Major obstacles include the lack of funding and political will as well as a dearth of proper documentation on African languages.

Given that UNESCO considers Africa a priority area, the Organization has launched a number of initiatives in favour of the Continent's languages. In 1997, the Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa, held in Harare, set the stage for the development of policy frameworks and implementation strategies\*. Practical action did not always follow.

We seem to be at a turning point now. Decisions regarding African languages recently made by the African Union (AU) point to an increased awareness among African decision makers on the essential role to be played by African languages in development. This year's Assembly of Heads of State of the AU in Khartoum proclaimed 2006 "the Year of African Languages" and designated the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) as the coordinator of language policy and planning on the African continent and special advisor to Member States in this field.

\* The comprehensive report of the meeting will be made available by the Intangible Heritage Section in September 2006, including an introduction by Neville Alexander (South Africa/ACALAN) retracing the developments since 1997.



### The four principal families of African languages

According to the renowned US linguist Joseph Greenberg, the approximately 2000 African languages can be classified in four principal families: Niger-Congo, Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan. With over 1,400 languages and about 360 million speakers in Africa, the Niger-Congo language family is the world's largest in terms of number of languages and Africa's largest in terms of number of speakers. Afroasiatic languages form Africa's second largest family (370 languages), followed by the Nilo-Saharan (nearly 200 languages), and Khoisan families (some 35 languages). Most African countries host a large variety of languages, the most linguistically diverse being Nigeria and Cameroon, with some 500 and 280 languages respectively. The most widely spoken languages are, apart from Arabic in the North, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Amharic; each is practised by nearly 20 million speakers as a first language. Swahili, a language of the Niger-Congo family, has about 4 million first language speakers but is used by over 40 million people as a second language, primarily in East Africa.

### Capacity-building for the preservation of African languages

The Intangible Heritage Section, with the support of ACALAN, launched a project to strengthen national and regional institutional capacities for language preservation in Africa. Sponsored by the Norwegian Government, the project is conducted in partnership with sub-Saharan African university departments and research institutions specializing in African languages. An initial expert meeting, organized in March 2006 in Bamako, Mali, brought together 50 linguists from 26 African countries and provided a platform for sharing experiences in research and fieldwork and promoting enhanced exchange and cooperation. A second meeting, which will focus on good practices in safeguarding endangered languages, is scheduled in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In addition, 5 community language safeguarding initiatives in Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Gabon were supported by UNESCO in 2004/2005 (see examples on pages 4 and 5).

# Inter-disciplinarity



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## UNESCO's different programme sectors join forces to promote linguistic diversity

### UNESCO's intersectoral programme for languages

Considering the crucial role of language in all spheres of life and the broad consensus on the urgent need to promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity, UNESCO is currently elaborating an intersectoral strategy integrating existing and future language-related programmes. This new integrated approach involves programmes and activities from the Organization's five sectors:

#### Culture Sector's main actions

- ◆ Safeguarding endangered languages and promoting languages as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage (Intangible Heritage Section);
- ◆ Promoting literature and translations and encouraging publishers to print and disseminate works in local languages (Cultural Enterprise and Copyright Section);
- ◆ Promoting cultural policies (Pluralism and Intercultural Dialogue Section).

#### Education Sector's main actions

- ◆ Supporting multilingual education and the elaboration of learning/teaching materials and textbooks in local languages (Section for Education for Peace and Human Rights);
- ◆ Promoting the role of local languages in the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment – LIFE (Section for Literacy and Non-formal Education).

#### Communication and Information Sector's main actions

- ◆ Supporting linguistic diversity in cyberspace (Information Access and Preservation Section);
- ◆ Promoting media content in local languages and building capacities for content producers (Development of Communication Section).

#### Natural Sciences Sector's main actions

- ◆ Supporting the role of local languages in the transmission of local and indigenous knowledge (Costal Regions and Small Islands Platform - LINKS)

#### Social and Human Sciences Sector's main actions

- ◆ Studying and strengthening the social aspects of multilingualism (Philosophy and Human Sciences Section, Human Rights and Development Section, Struggle against Discrimination and Racism Section).

Contact: Mauro Rosi, Intersectoral focal point for languages, m.rosi@unesco.org

*The 5000 Baka in Gabon form a group of forest people living in the northern border area to Cameroon. In contrast to other forest people groups who speak Bantu languages, the language of the Baka is part of the Ubangi language family.*

### Biological diversity and linguistic diversity – a vital link

Considerable research has been devoted to the link between biological and cultural diversity. Natural systems can be better understood, preserved and managed when taking into account the cultures that have developed while adapting to them, using them in a sustainable way, and often influencing and shaping them profoundly.

Since 2004, the Intangible Heritage Section has been involved in intersectoral activities aimed at safeguarding biodiversity and cultural diversity, and particularly linguistic diversity. Many local communities possess a deep body of knowledge in local flora, fauna, ecology and ecosystem dynamics. This traditional knowledge is both expressed and transmitted through their languages. In 2004 and 2005 UNESCO directed efforts at more clearly examining the link between biodiversity and cultural diversity through a series of field projects in all parts of the world. In addition, in April 2005, the Natural Science Sector and the Culture Sector jointly organized an expert meeting to investigate ways of sustaining the transmission of traditional knowledge about nature.

Since September 2005, the Intangible Heritage Section has been cooperating with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNEP) to develop an indicator of status and trends in linguistic diversity and numbers of speakers of indigenous languages. The indicator will serve to evaluate progress in preserving traditional knowledge worldwide. The data on the state of the world's linguistic diversity that will be collected and validated in the framework of this project, will undoubtedly prove useful for UNESCO's activities related to the 2003 Convention and cultural diversity.

***Ability to use and modify the environment, to engage in dialogue and to socialize is heavily dependant on language skills. Thus, marginalization or integration, exclusion or empowerment, poverty or development are, in a way, largely determined by linguistic choices.***

Koichiro MATSUURA, Director-General of UNESCO

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# Living Heritage

## PUBLICATIONS



The *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, which lists, region by region, some 800 endangered languages, aroused vivid interest among scholars, journalists and the general public. Since the publication of the Atlas, UNESCO has received regular feedback from the speaker communities, and hundreds of press articles in different parts of the world have been devoted to it.

Following two paper editions (1996 and 2001) of the Atlas, the web publication of an adapted and enhanced version of the Atlas has been initiated, starting with the African languages. An updated paper edition of the Atlas is planned for 2008. For information on endangered languages in Africa: [www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas](http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas)



Several Latin American countries have long-standing experience in implementing linguistic policies concerning indigenous languages. In order to take stock of these experiences and to transmit good practices, UNESCO's Havana Office with the support of UNAMAZ, the Association of Amazonian Universities, the Casa de las Américas and UNESCO Offices in Brasília, Quito and Lima, prepared six reports on linguistic policies in

Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela with a focus on endangered languages and associated oral traditions and expressions. The reports were published as a book and CD entitled *Lenguas y culturas en Amazonia. ¿Diversidad en peligro?* (Amazonian Languages and Cultures. Diversity in danger?), which was officially launched on the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, 21 May 2006. The work analyses current language policies and stresses the urgent need for concerted multilateral efforts to safeguard Amazonia's indigenous languages.

Contact: UNESCO Havana Office, Frédéric Vacheron, [f.vacheron@unesco.org](mailto:f.vacheron@unesco.org)

(continued from page 1)

owing to greater human mobility and the phenomenal development of global communication networks. However, if nothing is done, the world will be faced with a dramatic and detrimental loss of linguistic diversity, which, in many cases, will have traumatic consequences for the communities concerned. The most pessimistic experts claim that only a few hundred dominant, national or otherwise official languages can be considered safe.

Recent developments within and beyond UNESCO have led to a better understanding of fundamental considerations, such as:

- ♦ the interaction between language, culture and environment;
- ♦ the role of language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage;
- ♦ language as a mainspring of creativity and diversity;
- ♦ the crucial role of developing appropriate language policies for realizing the UN Millennium Development Goals, especially Education for All.

Over the past ten years, the Intangible Heritage Section has implemented a series of activities designed to examine and present the complex issue of language endangerment. This involved raising awareness through publications and media; encouraging pilot projects and identifying good practices, particularly in Africa; protecting language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; and exploring possible links between bio- and linguistic diversity. These various approaches are illustrated by the worldwide activities and projects described in this special issue of the *Intangible Heritage Messenger*.

The United Nations system has not yet produced a legal instrument specifically protecting language rights of groups or peoples. However, UNESCO, pursuing its overriding goal to protect creativity and cultural diversity worldwide, contributed to promoting linguistic diversity and multilingualism by elaborating and adopting several landmark international standard-setting instruments in the field of culture: the 2001 UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In the same spirit, several sectors of UNESCO have developed language related programmes, culminating in the Organization's new intersectoral strategy concerning language which is outlined on page 7. For UNESCO, bi- or multilingual education is a main means to preserve linguistic diversity and to create equal chances for everyone regardless of his/her native language.

In practice, endangered languages are safeguarded by measures on the part of national and local authorities, designing, funding and implementing appropriate policies. Moreover, in order to be successful and sustainable, all workable safeguarding measures require the involvement of the communities concerned; no language can be protected or revitalized without the wholehearted support of its speakers.

It would be great if half of today's approximately 6,700 languages would still be thriving as communication tools and anchors of identity around the year 2200. Thanks to UNESCO's upcoming role in safeguarding linguistic diversity, the UN system seems now better prepared to contribute to this essential objective.