



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Executive Board

Hundred and seventy-sixth session

176 EX/INF.15  
PARIS, 5 April 2007  
English & French only

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

## REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE EXECUTION OF THE PROGRAMME ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

### Intersectoral mid-term strategy on languages and multilingualism

#### SUMMARY

The Director-General transmits to the Executive Board for information the intersectoral mid-term strategy (2008-2013) elaborated by the Task Force for Languages and Multilingualism. Created on 20 January 2006 to ensure that the issue of languages is embedded effectively within the work of all Sectors and to identify new strategic orientations, this Task Force is chaired by the Director-General and composed of all programme ADGs, the ADG of the Africa Department and the Directors of BSP, BFC and CLD. This strategy is reflected in draft documents 34 C/4 and 34 C/5 presently submitted to the Executive Board.

1. **More than a tool and a means of communication, language is an essential component of human nature and, as such, a quintessential element of culture.** Through language, people understand and express emotions, intentions and values; shape their personality and their world; confirm social relations; and transmit cultural and social expressions and practices. Thus language constitutes a determining factor of the identity of individuals and groups. Indeed, **linguistic diversity is a major guarantee for cultural diversity.**

2. In this context multilingualism, as a practice making possible the harmonious coexistence of local, national and international languages, represents an expression of mutual respect, open interaction between peoples and effective intercultural dialogue. The development of linguistic policies ensuring harmonious communication between the global and the local is a prerequisite for peace and for the open, plural and sustainable development that UNESCO aims to promote, as well as a basic condition for the development of a truly inclusive knowledge society.

3. In addition to being an integral part of human identity, languages are a key factor for analysis and action in different policy areas. As a highly interdisciplinary and intersectoral domain, languages and multilingualism are strategic in regard to the most essential challenges facing humankind, and have to be taken into account in the development of strategies to meet the Millennium Development Goals:

- (i) Linguistic factors play a strategic role in the **eradication of extreme poverty and hunger** (Millennium Development Goal 1) because the ability to use the environment, to develop effective citizen empowerment by participating in social and public life, and to engage in dialogue is dependent, to a great extent, on language skills. Marginalization or integration, exclusion or empowerment, poverty or development are largely affected by linguistic policies and strategies.
- (ii) Linguistic factors 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) because language, as a principal medium of knowledge transmission, affects education and information. To be effective and adapted to the culture and needs of the learners, education (including health education) and literacy programmes must be delivered in languages understood by those learners.
- (iii) 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).
- (iv) Finally, the actual **enjoyment of fundamental rights** (expression, education, participation in cultural life, benefiting from scientific progress) is highly conditioned by linguistic factors. Languages thus provide an essential medium for exercising those rights.

4. Taking into due account the pervasiveness of languages as tools of a cultural nature, UNESCO will develop, during the Medium-Term period 2008-2013, **two main strategic intersectoral axes**. By promoting linguistic diversity and multilingualism, UNESCO will contribute, on the one hand, to **cultural diversity and dialogue** and, on the other hand, to **consolidating the role of culture in development strategies**.

5. These mid-term strategic intersectoral axes are connected to the overarching objective of promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and other major strategic objectives, such as: (i) attaining quality education for all; (ii) mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development; and (iii) building inclusive knowledge-societies **information and communication**.

6. To ensure coherence, improve Headquarters-field offices coordination and to match goals and means in the pursuit of such a complex strategic programme objective, special attention will need to be given to prioritizing tasks and mechanisms. **UNESCO will face the challenge of mobilizing specialized sectoral resources and skills in order to establish integrated strategies – mainly in the country-level planning process** – with effective intersectoral participation and clear Headquarters-field offices complementarity.

7. **Globally**, UNESCO will advocate, support and monitor actions in favour of the principles enshrined in or derived from UNESCO's normative tools related to languages and multilingualism,<sup>1</sup> it being understood that UNESCO will also refer to other relevant United Nations normative frameworks.<sup>2</sup> This will entail the following tasks:

- (i) Analysing existing normative instruments, including at the United Nations level, so as to produce a coherent shared vision of the principles to be followed;

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> For example: United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992).

- (ii) Producing promotional tools and communication material to convey appropriate messages;
- (iii) Monitoring the situation, through vigorous interaction between field offices and Headquarters, which also implies the production of underpinning analysis, indicators and statistics;
- (iv) Promoting sound practices and demonstrating their practical outcomes;
- (v) Facilitating and channelling multi-stakeholders, North-South and South-South partnerships within and beyond the UNESCO family.

8. **Locally**, UNESCO will support the elaboration of coherent and national (and when possible regional) language policies that promote appropriate measures for both corpus and status planning thus preparing for a wider use of as many languages as possible in families and communities and in all domains of public life (education, media, administration, court proceedings, cultural activities and facilities). In this framework, multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at capacity-building action will be facilitated at the field office level with synergetic support of all programme sectors.

9. UNESCO will play an active and specific role within the United Nations system, namely by drawing the attention of the United Nations stakeholders to the importance of linguistic factors in the UNDAF process, and by advocating the integration of the relevant Conventions into national development plans. Special attention should be paid to developing synergies, alliances and networks within the UNESCO family, including Associated Schools (ASPnet) and University Chairs, as well as with specialized networks and institutes, especially in the field of research, monitoring and policy development. In the framework of its partnerships at the regional level, UNESCO will attach particular importance to all initiatives that emphasize the integrative role of languages.

10. In this context, special attention should also be paid to reinforcing partnerships and synergies with the different regional or international cultural and linguistic networks and institutions, such as ACALAN, OIF, Union Latina and CPLP.

11. As a resource reservoir in the service of national language policies, programme sectors will participate in this intersectoral effort through specific strategic objectives, by providing guidance and means according to their respective domains of specialization and by channelling their specific multi-stakeholders resources:

- (i) The **Education Sector** will contribute to national language policies by focusing on multilingual education, and in particular, on the introduction of the mother tongue in formal and non-formal systems and in literacy programmes that can be linked to health issues, it being understood that a key condition for development is the respect for the intrinsic and necessary linkage between culture and education.<sup>3</sup> To this end, special efforts will be devoted to devising appropriate training strategies and tools for teachers at the primary school level. This contribution will be provided in the framework of the action developed, at the sectoral level, to foster quality education for all, in pursuit of sustainable development.
- (ii) The **Science Sector** will assist with overcoming language barriers that hinder knowledge-sharing among scientists and other knowledge holders. Furthermore, the Sector will promote the recognition of languages, and in particular vernacular languages, as vehicles for the transmission of local and indigenous knowledge, noting the latter's recognized contribution to natural resource management and sustainable development. This contribution will be provided in the framework of the action carried

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<sup>3</sup> 175 EX/Decision 21, para. 24.

out to leverage scientific knowledge for the benefit of the environment and the management of natural resources.

- (iii) The **Social and Human Sciences Sector** will focus its action on (a) the enhancement of the human rights approach to issues related to languages and multilingualism, under its activities related to cultural rights; (b) issues related to multilingualism under its activities related to migrations, in particular in urban contexts; and (c) in-depth interregional debate on the roles of languages and translation in intercultural dialogue, under its activities related to philosophy. An analysis of the status of research and the impact of research on policies related to languages and multilingualism will also be provided under those activities, in the pursuit of the strategic objectives related to monitoring critical societal issues.
- (iv) The **Culture Sector's** contribution will focus on the promotion of cultural diversity and dialogue. On the one hand, it will develop actions supporting the safeguarding and promotion of linguistic diversity, especially endangered languages, in the framework of its promotion of cultural diversity and as a vehicle for intangible cultural heritage. On the other hand, it will pay specific attention to the intellectual, literary and poetic heritage of humanity, as a means of encouraging dialogue between cultures. This contribution will be provided in the framework of the action deployed to strengthen the contribution of culture to sustainable development, to demonstrate the importance of exchanges and intercultural dialogue for social cohesion, reconciliation and peace, and to protect and enhance cultural heritage in a sustainable manner.

Given the cultural nature of the linguistic phenomenon, the **Culture Sector will ensure the intersectoral coordination of UNESCO programmes related to languages and multilingualism.**

- (v) As concerns the **Communication and Information Sector**, its specific area of competence will focus on:
  - (a) promoting an enabling environment for the inclusion of new languages and the dissemination of local content in cyberspace;
  - (b) ensuring access for all to information and communications technology, particularly in the public domain, by making ICTs accessible in as many languages as possible;
  - (c) promoting pluralism and cultural diversity in the media and international information networks notably with regard to the development of local content and policy advice for the inclusion of new languages in the digital world.

This contribution will be developed in the framework of the actions implemented sectorally in favour of universal access to quality information.

12. The **expected intersectoral outcomes** and related **performance indicators** of the above strategy are as follows:

- (i) Enhanced protection and promotion of endangered languages:
  - (a) the number of endangered languages recognized in Member States;
  - (b) the number of countries in which policies have been reviewed to protect endangered languages;

- (c) the number of countries in which concrete measures (including normalization, introduction in education system, literate environment and cyberspace) have been adopted in favour of endangered languages.
- (ii) Concrete measures adopted for the promotion of multilingualism, translation and linguistic exchange as means of intercultural integration and dialogue:
    - (a) the number of languages recognized in Member States;
    - (b) the number of projects carried out in the field of multilingualism;
    - (c) the number of countries in which concrete measures have been adopted in favour of multilingualism;
    - (d) resources allocated within Member States for linguistic exchange (interpretation, translation, foreign language courses, expert exchanges);
  - (iii) Developing monitoring tools on policy, research and funding:
    - (a) the number of monitoring tools (observatories, atlas and reports) developed in the field of monitoring;
    - (b) good practices collected and disseminated, both in the domain of linguistic policies and at the community level;
    - (c) the number of projects and initiatives (databases, publications and meetings) relating to good practices in safeguarding languages, both in the domain of linguistic policies and at the community level.
13. The corresponding **sources and means of verification** will be the following:
- (i) National and regional reports on endangered languages, *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, EFA monitoring reports;
  - (ii) National and regional reports, statistics from professional associations, Index Translationum;
  - (iii) Periodical surveys among specialists and reports on new and updated observatories, databases, atlas and findings.