United Nations
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Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Final Recommendations for the Action Plan of UNESCO's World Atlas of Languages

Preamble

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the importance of languages that individuals speak and acknowledges it, as essence for the realization of the fundamental human rights and freedoms. Therefore, language should be considered as a key asset by all stakeholders for ensuring sustainable development and peace.

Many linguistic communities remain underprivileged in enjoying and exercising their rights and freedoms, in expressing their views and opinions, and communicating in a most meaningful and effective manner. Speakers of endangered languages require special attention, in particular to have access to education and economic prospects.

The constant technological progress has brought about multiple opportunities for users to access, create and share information and knowledge in various languages,and to benefit from new models of learning and socio-economic development. This progress not only changed the way language communities communicate with each other, but also how they contribute to language documentation, revitalization, monitoring and maintenance. Regrettably, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are not evenly spread and made available around the world – there are deep inequalities in terms of universal access. The growing digital divide is even more reinforced by the existing linguistic divide.

UNESCO is convinced that linguistic diversity and multilingualism have a key role to play in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open and inclusive knowledge societies. In this regard, the Organization supports the safeguarding all languages and their inclusion in the digital world – in particular those which are not represented online – and the creation and dissemination of local content on the Internet and mass communication channels.

The Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 2003, is the only normative instrument at the international level, focusing on the promotion of these priorities.

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From 28 to 29 October 2014 at its Headquarters in Paris, UNESCO, in cooperation with the Government of Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug-Ugra(Russian Federation), the Permanent Delegation of the Russian Federation for UNESCO and the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, organized a two-day international expert meeting bringing together leading experts, researchers, and policymakers to discuss the status of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, including in cyberspace, and determine the next concrete step to be taken by UNESCO.

The focus of the discussions was two-fold:

- Further steps for the implementation of the Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace and an examination of the recommendations of the third International Conference, "Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace", held in Yakutsk, Russian Federation from 28 June to 3 July 2014;
- Elaboration of a plan of action and initiation of new partnerships to upscale UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger to UNESCO's Atlas of World's Languages for the monitoring and promotion of the world's languages online, and strengthen cooperation and knowledge sharing using open and inclusive technological solutions among international, regional and national language institutions.

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We, the participants in the International Expert Meeting on Improving Access to Multilingual Cyberspace,

Fully committed to the promotion of linguistic diversity, according to the UNESCO's Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace (2003), the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the ongoing debate of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals,

Recalling that multilingualism is one of the main strategic priorities of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP),

Referring to the relevant Resolutions of the General Conference of UNESCO with regard to the promotion of multilingualism and universal access to information,

Convinced that the development of ICTs provides great opportunities to improve the presence of, and access to, languages in cyberspace, but it also presents new challenges for language users,

Noting that current disparities in technological support for world's languages impede equitable access to information and knowledge, and that language communities without sufficient institutional, financial, political and technological support are becoming further marginalized,

Recognizing that promotion and safeguarding of linguistic diversity is a key asset of humankind, compared to the importance of biodiversity, it should be at the core of contemporary debates in the globalized world as a determining factor in the development of inclusive knowledge societies,

Inviting UNESCO and its Members States and partners to increase efforts for the implementation of the Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace and of the recommendations of the third International Conference, "Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace", held in Yakutsk, Russian Federation from 28 June to 3 July 2014,

Alsorecalling the importance of upscaling UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger as a central tool for the accomplishment of the above goals, as follows: (i) through the monitoring and promotion of the world's languages; (ii) the provision of comprehensive information about languages to all stakeholders, particularly policy decision-makers; and (iii) by using open and inclusive technological solutions enabling sharing of e-content on languages,

Recommend the present Action Plan to UNESCO for its work on the promotion of linguistic diversity and onthe creation of its World Atlas of Languages:

Policy and strategic orientations

1. Member States should formulate and adopt sustainable national language policies on the crucial issue of linguistic diversity and multilingual, including promotion, safeguarding, representation, technological development and use of the world's languages, and the development of national competencies. The establishment of comprehensive language policy frameworks will help to ensure that rights and freedoms of every language user and community are equally respected and protected.

2. Strategies must be designed to promote the learning and teaching of languages using solutions provided by technological and scientific progress. International support and assistance to developing countries should be strengthened and extended to facilitate the development of freely accessible materials on language education in electronic and open forms and human capital in this area. To this end, Member States should adopt and implement specific policiesfor the improvement ofaccess to cyberspace for disadvantaged communitieswho are oftencarriersandcustodians of languages in danger.

3. Member States should encourage technological solution developers and Internet service providers to consider facilitating affordable Internet access in public service institutions, such as schools, academic institutions, museums, archives and public libraries, as a transitional measure towards universal access to cyberspace.

4. UNESCO, its Member States and other relevant stakeholders concerned, should develop training materials and build the capacity of content developers, particularly local content producers and providers, in using sustainable formats that enable universal content sharing.

Development of technological solutions

5. UNESCO and its Member States should encourage research and development on language technology systems/tools with extensive multilingual capabilities, especially with regard to operating systems, search engines and web browsers.

6. Furthermore, efforts should be supported with regard to developing advanced information services, such as those for multilingual information retrieval offering speech understanding, instant machine translation and interpretation and other intelligent linguistic services.

7. Development of multilingual content resources making language technology systems/tools and information services more effective, such as online dictionaries and terminologies, text and speech corpora, should be encouraged.

8. UNESCO, in cooperation with other international, regional and national organizations, should establish a collaborative online platform - UNESCO's World Atlas of Languages, containing a full data on world's languages, policies, regulations, technical recommendations and best practices in this field.

9. Member States and international organizations should encourage the development and application of open access solutions including the formulation of technical and methodological standards, design of sustainable formats for information exchange, ensuring portability and interoperability, as well as accessibility of digital public domain information on global information networks throughout its lifecycle, regardless of the technology used when it was originally created.

Strengthening international cooperation and building partnerships

10. UNESCO, its Members States and partners concerned should support capacity-building for the production of local and indigenous content, on the Internet, and foster cooperation especially in favor of endangered language communities.

11. The public and private sectors, research community, the civil society and other stakeholders at large should encourage the creation, processing of, and access to multilingual educational, cultural and scientific content in digital and open forms and work to provide the necessary resources as indispensable measures to alleviate language barriers for a different range of users, including marginalized communities.

12. Inter-agency cooperation within the United Nations system should be reinforced in that respect with a view to building up the existing experience for the benefit of developing countries and disadvantaged communities.

Over the next two-year period

13. UNESCO, in close cooperation with other relevant partners, should establish an Advisory Group for the upscaling of the UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger to UNESCO's World Atlas of Languages. This Group will be composed of professionals and experts within the relevant fields, respecting geographical representation and gender balance.

14. UNESCO, in partnership with other relevant bodies, should develop a mechanism and sustainable tools for monitoring language vitality and for the assessment, promotion and preservation of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, including in cyberspace, applying innovative technological solutions. To that end, UNESCO should revise the existing Language Vitality Index to cover most of the world's languages.

15. UNESCO should further promote multilingualism in the context of the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and on the World Summit on the Information Society outcomes implementation, and also consider the organisation of a World Summit on Multilingualism.