UNESCO-UNU International Conference on
Globalization and Languages: Building on Our Right Heritage

REPORT
Workshop 4
Policy-Making and Standard Setting Instruments

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I UNESCO’s Role

UNESCO, as the lead Agency for the International Year of Languages, has a
responsibility to stimulate international action of a concrete nature with respect to
the international safeguarding of linguistic diversity and in guaranteeing language
rights. UNESCO’s mandate, especially the fields of human rights and culture,
enables it to take a co-ordinating role in this domain.

UNESCO should urge Member States to fulfil their existing obligations under
international treaties to protect and promote minority linguistic rights and linguistic
diversity.

II The role of various actors with respect to safeguarding languages

In view of the cross-cutting nature of safeguarding languages, UNESCO should
foster its cooperation in this specific domain with other agencies of the UN.

It is the responsibility of the State to develop an effective language policy at the
national level (based on agreed criteria) with special concentration on endangered
languages. States also have a responsibility to enable citizens and communities that have shown a commitment to develop their language and culture. This community empowerment could also take the form of public and private partnerships.

Linguistic communities have a concomitant responsibility to seek such assistance.

All States should adopt language policies that favour multilingualism and plurilingualism.

States and communities should target Children and Youth, ensuring that opportunities exist for the encouragement and promotion of inter-generational transmission of language.

III Policy Considerations

Language learning at the sub-national, national and extra-national levels enhances cultural awareness, societal participation, social cohesion, intercultural competence and mutual understanding and respect. This enriches the whole of society.

Recognition of cultural and linguistic rights has the potential to enhance political stability and contribute to sustainable development.

State should aim to develop language policies through negotiated discursive approaches to policy formulation, thus localising decision-making as much as possible.

The retention of minority or regional languages generally does not endanger or threaten the acquisition of the national language (if different), or the acquisition of an international language.

The trans-boundary nature of languages needs to be taken into account.

Awareness raising of the value of languages and linguistic diversity should be promoted and should include the identification of certain domains where language can be reinforced: health, workplace, media, education, business.

There should be some consideration of language as a Human Right, rather than simply as a cultural issue.

IV Practical implementation

To this end, UNESCO should adopt a political declaration that encourages the ratification by Member States of existing normative instruments that contribute to the safeguarding of languages.

Provision of an institutional umbrella mechanism that would encourage actions regionally or sub-regionally
An **institutional mechanism** (e.g. an Observatory) should be established as an over-arching international framework model, in partnership with regional mechanisms to act as:

- A clearing house
- A laboratory of ideas, for example through the establishment of a glossary of terms with the purpose of control so as to appropriately clarify and define concepts
- A human and institutional capacity-builder in Member States
- A monitoring/reporting body
- Provision of a forum for indigenous peoples to enable the bringing to the fore of their claims.

The **question of funding** such a mechanism will need to be considered. This could be through voluntary extrabudgetary contributions of Member States and/or contributions from regional intergovernmental institutions

**National inventories** could be undertaken to establish certain information with a view to future benchmarking, such as:

- what languages do exist?;
- what is their status?;
- what is the number/age of speakers?;
- what legislation exists to protect/promote languages?
- how is the language used – solely private, public, mix of public and private?;
- ICH?;
- documentation and access?

An **International Directory of Linguistic Policies**, similar to the World Heritage List, could be established with a view to recognising good policy practices. The purpose of such a Directory would be to:

- Allow for the sharing of information on relevant issues
- Provide a cadre for similar legislation
- Become a Best Practice Register (States named)
- Provide international publicity and awareness raising of the issues

The National Inventories could feed into the international directory.

Very clear criteria for inclusion must be established – not foreign languages, but migrant languages. Criteria for vulnerability (IUCN) must also be understood.