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Dimensions of language rights in the SDGs

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- The discussion of language rights has often referred to a distinction between ‘negative’ or non-discriminatory tolerance-oriented rights, and ‘positive’ or affirmative promotion-oriented rights, although this division is increasingly being challenged. A more useful distinction may be between language rights for an individual (particularly a child), and language rights for a group or community. At an individual level, the right for a child to use and learn through their mother tongue confers cognitive and psycho-social benefits, resulting in better educational (bilingual and/or multilingual) and social outcomes. At a group level, the rights of communities to use their mother tongues as well as gain access to the dominant language results in better communication and participation in wider society.
- These rights underpin all of the SDGs, and need to be accounted for in policy and planning by governments, donors and implementing organisations.

Some theory…

‘Language rights’ = ‘linguistic human rights’

Positive rights vs Negative rights

‘Individual’ and ‘collective’

Underlying issues for SDGs and language

Poverty co-occurs with linguistic diversity

(refs)

Reasons for co-occurrence complex

(refs)

Language not included in the SDGs

(refs)

UDLR Article 47 (1)

All language communities have the right to establish the use of their language in all socioeconomic activities within their territory.

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

UDLR Article 13 (1)

Everyone has the right to acquire knowledge of the language proper to the territory in which he/she lives.

- Knowledge of ecosystems is encoded in local languages

Terralingua
UNITY IN BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY

'Baby care', http://www.bigbrothermouse.com/books.html

UDLR Article 16

All members of a language community have the right to interrelate with and receive attention from the public authorities in their own language.

UDLR Article 24

All language communities have the right to decide to what extent their language is to be present, as a vehicular language and as an object of study, at all levels of education within their territory.

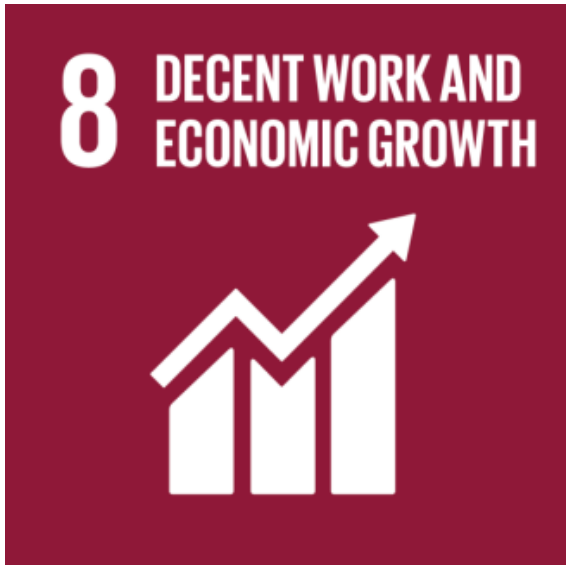
- Mother-Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) is most cost-effective and faster to other languages.

UDLR Preliminaries

Having regard to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which, in its preamble, expresses its (faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women(;

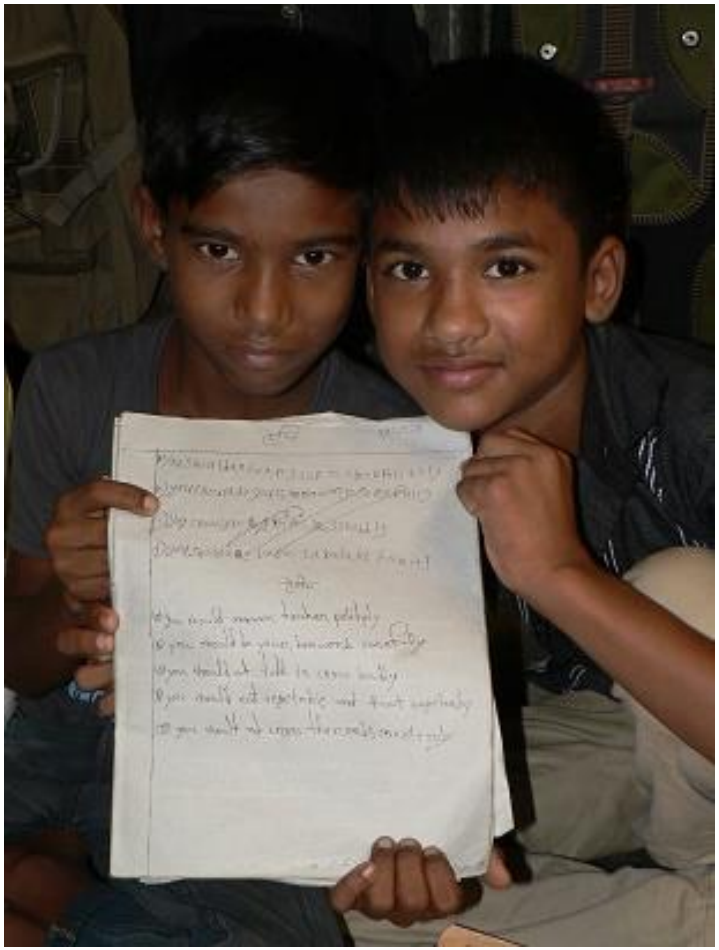
- Everyone needs a ‘voice’ in decision-making, e.g. for privatisation of water

- Dialogue with stakeholders will ensure sustainability of innovations



- Access to official and ‘international’ languages = opportunity for work

- Linguistic issues underpin sustainable growth



- Increasing power of a global Anglophone élite

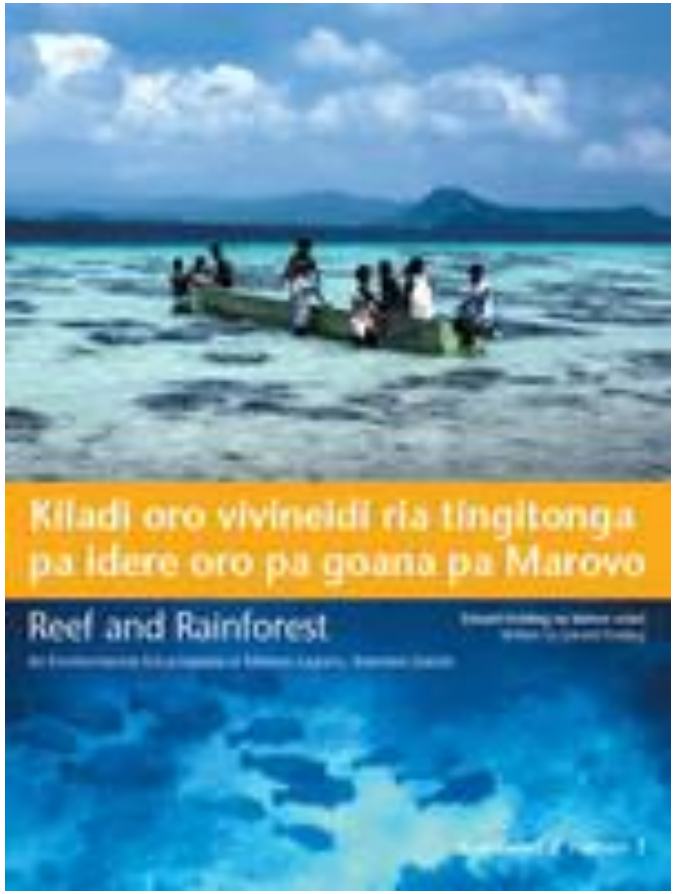
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

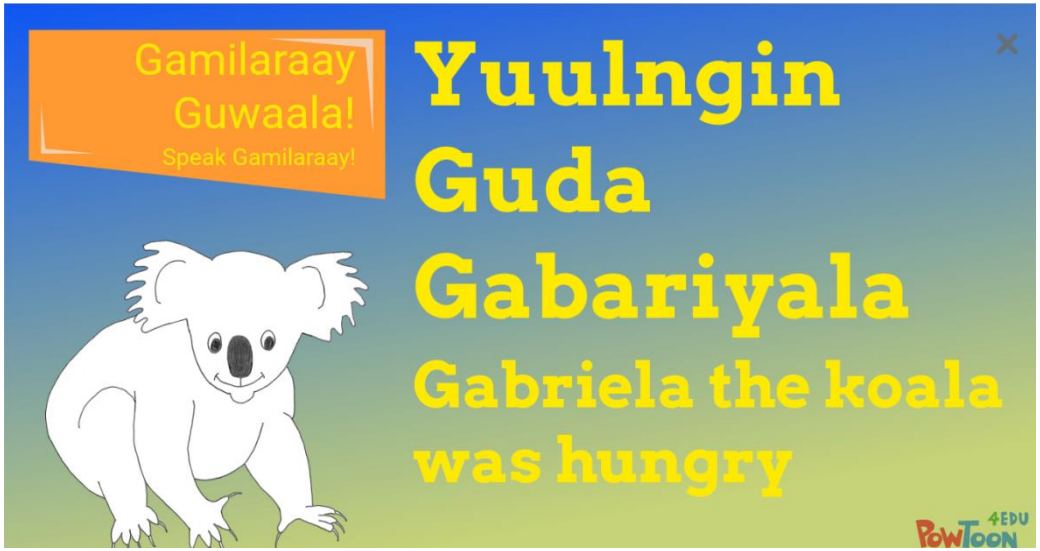
- Disaster preparedness plans need to reach all language groups

- Traditional knowledge systems encoded in language

- Climate change mitigation efforts more sustainable if linked in to traditional concepts

- Local languages carry traditional knowledge about the sustainable use of marine resources





- Ethnobotany links to linguistic knowledge of terrestrial ecosystems

- Languages are central to cultural identity (→ justice, peace, inclusiveness)

- Translation and interpretation will enable everyone to be included in the partnerships

Conclusion

Language and the UN (2016, p. 2):

‘[T]here is an urgent need to include language at the planning, implementation and assessment stages of each of the SDGs.’

→ aid projects and programmes

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