United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Background Guide 2014

Committee History

Introduction

Guided by the motto, “Building peace in the minds of men and women,” the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). The Organization was formed shortly after World War II, with its Constitution going into effect in 1946 after ratification by twenty UN Member States. The Constitution directly connects the committee to its historical context with the ultimate goal of preventing another outbreak of war by combating ignorance, creating peace through mutual understanding, and fostering the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”

Today, the organization is at the forefront of scientific and social knowledge, with competencies in a wide variety of subjects. Two of its most important broad goals are sustainable development and building a culture of peace, but UNESCO strives to make progress in a variety of fields, including education, cultural diversity, and knowledge-building and sharing. An additional key element of UNESCO’s work involves designating and developing policies to protect and promote World Heritage Sites. The Organization adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972, which created the World Heritage List. As of August 2013, 981 sites were included on the list for their “outstanding universal value.”
Mandate

The mandate of UNESCO can be broadly defined as promoting peace in the world through education, science, culture and communication, and by providing information and expertise on these topics. Moreover, UNESCO also is tasked with aiding in international security by bolstering collaboration between Member States to create a culture of “respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms” for all people. UNESCO views many elements of its mandate as interwoven with each other, and much overlap exists with other UN agencies; however, UNESCO is unique in some of its mandates, for example, by considering post-secondary education, and is the lead UN agency to deliberate on certain subjects, such as the broader topic of education.

In addition to the broadly defined goals of the Organization, UNESCO has three main objectives more specifically addressed in Article 1 of the Constitution. UNESCO aims to, firstly, promote understanding between peoples in the world, secondly, to enhance education and cultural exchange, and finally, to “maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge.” While its specific priorities have changed and developed over time, the importance of promoting collaboration and working with UN entities as well as outside partners has remained critical in achieving its mandate.

Governance, Structure and Membership

UNESCO’s structure is divided into three constitutional organs: the General Conference, the Executive Board, and the Secretariat. The General Conference governs the committee while the Executive Board oversees their work. The General Conference is the “primary decision-making body,” meeting every two years in order to plan the strategies and priorities for UNESCO while also approving the upcoming program and budget. The Executive Board meets biannually to discuss the current status of UNESCO’s programs and budget. It is comprised of the Director-General, chosen every four years, and the staff. There are over 2,000 staff members working for UNESCO in its headquarters in Paris, and more than 700 staff members are employed by UNESCO’s 65 regional offices located internationally.

Membership is allowed for any Member State of the UN. As per Article 2 of the UNESCO Constitution, non-members of the UN may be admitted to UNESCO upon the recommendation of the Executive Board and a two-thirds majority vote by the General Conference. The Organization gained international attention in 2011 when it voted to admit Palestine into UNESCO, who then together with the non-UN Member States, Cook Islands and Niue, became a member. This decision was controversial, and the United States and Israel both ceased to pay their required membership dues to UNESCO after the admission of Palestine; this action, in turn, led to both the United States and Israel losing their voting rights in UNESCO in November 2013. Each UN Member State, except for Liechtenstein, is a part of the UNESCO General Conference, resulting in 195 total members and eight Associate Members, which are non-state territories. The Executive Board is comprised of 58 Member States.

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1 UNESCO, Introducing UNESCO [Website].
2 UNESCO, The Organization’s History [Website].
4 UN Department of Public Information, UNESCO [Website], 2010.
5 Ibid.
6 UNESCO, About World Heritage [Website].
7 UN Department of Public Information, UNESCO [Website], 2010.
8 UNESCO, World Heritage List [Website].
10 Ibid., art. 1.
13 Ibid.
Functions and Powers

The UNESCO Executive Board established the Organization’s five current functions in its 190th session in 2012 to be implemented at all levels of UNESCO’s work, including global, regional, and national levels. Its functions include: “serving as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice” in its different areas of work; assisting in the global work done in its areas of competence with policy advice and analysis; “setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation;” and, facilitating cooperation in these areas, involving all levels of stakeholders and supporting information-sharing.

In addition to the functions of UNESCO as a whole organization, each specialized sector, or major programme, of UNESCO has its own unique mandate, priorities, and mission, to guide its work. These five sector divisions are (1) Education, (2) Natural Sciences, (3) Social and Human Sciences, (4) Culture, and (5) Communication. Each thematic branch of the Organization focuses on its own areas of competence, thus requiring different strategies and goals for each of them.

While each major programme has its own focus, the organization works as a whole on the current global priorities of Africa and Gender Equality, in addition to its many other overlapping issues. Under the priority Africa, UNESCO is attempting to integrate the continent into its work in creating, executing, and evaluating its programs, placing a special emphasis on reconstruction after conflicts. The second global priority, Gender Equality, has been in effect since the year 2007 and is on the agenda until 2021, and emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to women and girls’ rights in all domains of UNESCO’s work.

Working with NGOs and UN Agencies
An important element of UNESCO’s work is its collaboration with a variety of partners, including other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to fulfill its mandate. NGOs play a pivotal part in the work of UNESCO, and are even specifically mentioned and allowed in its Constitution; the organization enhances its work by partnering with NGOs to combine knowledge and resources, to build alliances, and to improve its efficacy. For example, in 2010, UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Smithsonian Institute, a museum and research complex based in the United States, to cooperate on preserving and educating about natural and cultural heritage; together, they are utilizing UNESCO’s archival research and the Smithsonian’s historical research to develop joint programs. Today, UNESCO enjoys “official partnerships with 373 international NGOs and 24 foundations and similar institutions,” while also working with hundreds more on specific projects.

15 UNESCO, Executive Board: Mandates and Functions [Website].
16 UN Department of Public Information, UNESCO [Website], 2010.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 UNESCO, The executive branch of the Organization [Website].
22 Ibid, art. 2.
23 UNESCO Press, Palestinian flag raised at UNESCO [Website], 2011; UNESCO, List of the 195 Members (and the 8 Associate Members) of UNESCO [Website].
25 UNESCO, List of the 195 Members (and the 8 Associate Members) of UNESCO [Website]; UNESCO, Member States [Website].
26 UNESCO, Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board [Report], 2012; UNESCO, List of the 195 Members (and the 8 Associate Members) of UNESCO [Website].
28 Ibid.
29 UNESCO, Approved Programme and Budget 2012-2013 (36 C/5) [Report], 2012.
30 Ibid.
Recent Sessions

At UNESCO’s most recent meeting, the 36th session of the General Conference, held in October and November 2011, the organization discussed a wide array of topics as they relate to the major programmes.39 Within their discussions, the General Conference also addressed challenging topical issues, such as ensuring access to education in occupied Palestinian territories, while continuing to discuss the Medium Term Strategy for the years 2014-2021, a critical document outlining the priorities and actions taken by UNESCO.40 Another important meeting of UNESCO was the recently formed High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures, whose third meeting took place in November 2012.41 The debate had the theme “Building Peace: UNESCO’s role in the next decade,” where they discussed the involvement of youth in dialogues and the cultivation of peace, when so many seem disengaged and apathetic.42

In June 2013, UNESCO held its 37th annual World Heritage statutory meeting to discuss the status of various sites, including the sites that may be at risk.43 The General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, which meets every two years as a 21-member committee, had its 18th session in November 2011, while the next meeting will be in November 2013; the committee meets biannually to discuss funding the World Heritage Sites and to elect new members to the General Assembly of States Parties, and has recently discussed such topics as “Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List.”44

Conclusion

Within the United Nations, UNESCO has been called the “intellectual agency,” and is an indispensable source of research and knowledge for the international community and the rest of the UN system.45 As the UN moves forward in attempting to build peace and facilitate sustainable development, UNESCO’s importance is clear; for example, it took a deliberate step towards peace by allowing Palestine’s entry.46 Delegates must consider how to leverage this position to achieve the organization’s goals in its many different subject areas, while keeping in mind its current mission statement: to “contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.”47

31 Ibid.
33 UN Department of Public Information, UNESCO [Website], 2010.
35 UNESCO, Non-Governmental Organizations [Website].
37 UNESCO, UNESCO and the Smithsonian sign a Memorandum of Understanding for cultural and natural heritage [Website], 2010; UNESCO, UNESCO and the Smithsonian Institution team up to celebrate the World Heritage Convention [Website], 2012.
38 UNESCO, Non-Governmental Organizations [Website]: UN DPI, UNESCO [Website], 2010.
41 UNESCO, High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures [Website], 2012.
42 Ibid.
43 UNESCO, 37th Session of the Committee [Website].
45 UNESCO, Introducing UNESCO [Website].
46 UNESCO Press, Palestinian flag raised at UNESCO [Website], 2011; UNESCO, Introducing UNESCO [Website].
47 UNESCO, 2014-2021: Draft Medium-Term Strategy (37 C/4) [Report], 2
Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2014 International Model United Nations Conference.

The topics under discussion for the General Assembly Fourth Committee are:

1. Preserving Linguistic Diversity and Protecting Endangered Languages
2. Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies in order to protect UNESCO World Heritage Sites
3. Empowering Citizens through Universal Access to Information

The background guide serves as a tool to prepare you for your research by providing you with an overview of the three topics and the committee. Its only purpose is to serve as an introduction to your topics and should not be the only resource utilized in your research. The references provided in the bibliography are meant to aid you in your research as well and provide you with a strong starting point. Please be sure to take advantage of the numerous resources available on each topic in order to have a well-rounded view of each topic. The research done on these topics will assist you in the writing of the position paper. The position paper provides you with an opportunity to discuss each topic from the perspective of the country you are representing. Please be sure to pay close attention to the formatting requirements for your position paper.

If you have any questions about preparation, the committee, or the conference in general, please contact me via e-mail at dsamsingh@unescocenterforpeace.org. I thank you in advance for all of the hard work you will devote to this committee and we wish you well in your preparation and I look forward to meeting you in July.

A Note to the Reader: This background guide was compiled by Danielle Samsingh using information made available by the National Collegiate Conference Association, NMUN 2013 Conference and their associates.


Position Paper for the General Assembly Plenary

The issues before the General Assembly Plenary are: The Use of Economic Sanctions for Political and Economic Compulsion; Democracy and Human Rights in Post-Conflict Regions; as well as The Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa. The Mexican Delegation first would like to convey its gratitude being elected and pride to serve as vice-president of the current General Assembly Plenary session.

I. The Use of Economic Sanctions for Political and Economic Compulsion

The principles of equal sovereignty of states and non-interference, as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, have always been cornerstones of Mexican foreign policy. The legitimate right to interfere by the use of coercive measures, such as economic sanctions, is laid down in Article 41 of the UN-charter and reserves the right to the Security Council.

Concerning the violation of this principle by the application of unilateral measures outside the framework of the United Nations, H.E. Ambassador to the United Nations Enrique Berruga Filloy underlined in 2005 that the Mexico strongly rejects “the application of unilateral laws and measures of economic blockade against any State, as well as the implementation of coercive measures without the authorization enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.” That is the reason, why the United Mexican States supported – for the 14a consecutive time – Resolution (A/RES/60/12) of 2006 regarding the Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

In the 1990s, comprehensive economic sanctions found several applications with very mixed results, which made a critical reassessment indispensable. The United Mexican States fully supported and actively participated in the “Stockholm Process” that focused on increasing the effectiveness in the implementation of targeted sanctions. As sanctions and especially economic sanctions, pose a tool for action “between words and war” they must be regarded as a mean of last resort before war and fulfill highest requirements for their legitimate use. The United Mexican States and their partners of the “Group of Friends of the U.N. Reform” have already addressed and formulated recommendations for that take former criticism into account. Regarding the design of economic sanctions it is indispensable for the success to have the constant support by all member states and public opinion, which is to a large degree dependent on the humanitarian effects of economic sanctions. Sanctions must be tailor-made, designed to effectively target the government, while sparing to the largest degree possible the civil population. Sanction regimes must be constantly monitored and evaluated to enable the world-community to adjust their actions to the needs of the unforeseeably changing situation. Additionally, the United Mexican States propose to increase communication between the existing sanction committees and thus their effectiveness by convening regular meetings of the chairs of the sanction committees on questions of common interest.

II. Democracy and Human Rights in Post-Conflict Regions

As a founding member of the United Nations, Mexico is highly engaged in the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights all over the world, as laid down in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Especially since the democratic transition of Mexico in 2000 it is one of the most urgent topics to stand for Democratization And Human Rights and Mexico implements this vision on many different fronts.

In the Convoking Group of the intergovernmental Community of Democracies (GC), the United Mexican States uphold an approach that fosters international cooperation to promote democratic values and institution-building at the national and international level. To emphasize the strong interrelation between human rights and the building of democracy and to fortify democratic developments are further challenges Mexico deals with in this committee. A key-factor for the sustainable development of a post-conflict-region is to hold free and fair election and thus creating a democratic system. Being aware of the need of post-conflict countries for support in the preparation of democratic elections, the United Mexican States contribute since 2001 to the work of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), an intergovernmental organization operating at international, regional and national level in partnership with a range of institutions. Mexico’s foreign policy regarding human rights is substantially
Based on cooperation with international organizations. The Inter American Commission of Human Rights is one of the bodies; Mexico is participating, working on the promotion of Human Rights in the Americas. Furthermore, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is the regional judicial institution for the application and interpretation of the American Convention of Human Rights.

The objectives Mexico pursues are to improve human rights in the country through structural changes and to fortify the legal and institutional frame for the protection of human rights on the international level. Underlining the connection between democracy, development and Human Rights, stresses the importance of cooperation with and the role of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the reform of the Human Rights Commission to a Human rights Council.

Having in mind the diversity of challenges in enforcing democracy and Human Rights, Mexico considers regional and national approaches vital for their endorsement, as Mexico exemplifies with its National Program for Human Rights or the Plan Puebla Panama. On the global level, Mexico is encouraged in working on a greater coordination and interoperability among the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as the development of common strategies and operational policies and the sharing of best practices in civilian crisis management should be encouraged, including clear frameworks for joint operations, when applicable.

III. The Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa

The United Mexican States welcome the leadership role the African Union has taken regarding the security problems of the continent. Our delegation is furthermore convinced that The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) can become the foundation for Africa’s economic, social and democratic development as the basis for sustainable peace. Therefore it deserves the full support of the international community.

The development of the United Mexican States in the last two decades is characterized by the transition to a full democracy, the national and regional promotion of human rights and sustainable, economic growth. Mexico's development is characterized by free trade and its regional integration in the North American Free Trade Agreement. Having in mind that sustainable development is based not only on economic, but as well on social and environmental development, President Vicente Fox has made sustainable development a guiding principle in the Mexican Development Plan that includes sustainability targets for all major policy areas.

The United Nations Security Council has established not less than seven peace-keeping missions on the African continent, underlining the need for full support by the international community. In post-conflict situations, we regard national reconciliation as a precondition for a peaceful development, which is the reason why Mexico supported such committees, i.e. in the case of Sierra Leone. The United Mexican States are convinced that another to enhance durable peace in Africa is the institutional reform of the United Nations. We therefore want to reaffirm our full support to both the establishment of the peace-building commission and the Human Rights Council. Both topics are highly interrelated and, having in mind that the breach of peace is most often linked with severest human rights’ abuses, thus need to be seen as two sides of one problem and be approached in this understanding.

As most conflicts have their roots in conflicts about economic resources and development chances, human development and the eradication of poverty must be at the heart of a successful, preventive approach. Lifting people out of poverty must be seen as a precondition not only for peace, but for social development and environmental sustainability.

The United Mexican States want to express their esteem for the decision taken by the G-8 countries for a complete debt-relief for many African Highly-Indebted-Poor-Countries. Nevertheless, many commitments made by the international community that are crucial for Africa’s sustainable development are unfulfilled. The developed countries agreed in the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development (A/CONF.198/11) to increase their Official Development Aid (ODA) “towards the target of 0, 7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) as ODA to developing countries and 0, 15 to 0, 20 per cent of GNP of developed countries to least developed countries”. Furthermore, the United Mexican States are disappointed by the result of the Hong Kong Ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization, which once more failed to meet the needs of those, to whom the round was devoted: developing countries and especially African countries, which today, more than ever, are cut off from global trade and prosperity by protectionism.
I. Preserving Linguistic Diversity and Protecting Endangered Languages

“The cultural wealth of the world is in its diversity in dialogue.”

Introduction

As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states, “languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet.” The international community is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of languages in development, in promoting cultural heritage, in aiding communication across cultures, in providing access to quality education for all, and providing access to information across the globe. Languages are integrally linked to cultural diversity, as spoken and written languages are the main vessels through which cultures can be transmitted; linguistic diversity is the key to cultural diversity.

However, linguistic diversity is in danger today; if “language death” occurs at its current rate, a different language could become extinct approximately every ten days. Experts estimate that unless action is taken now, half of the world’s 6,000 languages could be extinct by the end of the century. An extinct language is one that has no known speakers remaining and is no longer in daily use, while language death can be defined as when the last conversation in that language occurred. Language death occurs when native speakers of a language switch to another language, which is more widely used, dominant, or revered. While historically linked to colonialism and European expansion, languages are dying today at an unprecedented rate due to increased globalization and the heightened spread of certain world languages, such as English.

Promoting linguistic diversity relates to all facets of UNESCO’s mandate, leading UNESCO to be the main UN organ responsible for addressing this issue, and requiring the organization to take an interdisciplinary across its various sectors. One useful tool that UNESCO developed in 1996 and has improved continuously since then is the Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, in which the organization classifies different levels of endangerment from most at risk to least, as: extinct, critically endangered, severely endangered, definitely endangered, and vulnerable. This list is not exhaustive of all languages at risk, but does contain over 2,400 languages; for a further list of languages, one can reference the Ethnologue, which contains information on over 7,000 languages and dialects, some not officially recognized in UNESCO’s catalogue of languages. Other linguists and classification systems use different labels or requirements for levels of language threat; an important term to know is “moribund,” which describes languages that are no longer being learned and used as native languages by children, and are thus on the verge of dying.

The Importance of Linguistic Diversity

Although some critics claim that the extinction of languages is a natural process that does not require attention, this is an urgent issue for UNESCO to address; the current rate of language extinction is unprecedented in history, and surpasses the extinction rate of any living species, such as animals or mammals. When languages die, it is impossible to know what human knowledge is lost with that language. Furthermore, cultural diversity is lost in the process as populations become more homogenized and integrated into the dominant language and culture, often for economic purposes, losing facets of their unique identities, as encapsulated in languages. Linguistic diversity is most prevalent in areas where small populations live in relative seclusion, as different communities will develop their own unique languages. For example, the small island state of Vanuatu has a population of approximately 200,000 people but has 109 different languages spoken within the country, representing many distinct cultures. When a language dies, this represents an “erosion or extinction of ideas, of ways of knowing, and ways of talking about the world and human experience.” Language death is closely related to political and social marginalization and discrimination, as well, as native speakers are discouraged from speaking their native tongue or are deprived of the opportunity through the public educational system.

The loss of languages has serious implications in terms of losing various forms of knowledge, including scientific and historical. For example, within the pharmaceutical industry, it is estimated that $85 billion in profits are gained each year from indigenous peoples’ medicinal knowledge and plants; when their means of communication is at risk,
this valuable knowledge is also threatened.\textsuperscript{69} Much knowledge about science, nature, animals, as well as cultural heritage in the form of poetry, stories, and lullabies cannot be numerically quantified, but is undoubtedly important to preserve.\textsuperscript{70}

**International Framework**

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 2 November 2001, establishes cultural diversity as a valuable resource that is dynamic, changing, and part of the key to humanity’s survival and peace, and links linguistic diversity to this.\textsuperscript{71} Article 5 of the Declaration states the right of all persons to express themselves freely and to produce work in their mother tongue or another chosen language.\textsuperscript{72} Further, in the Action Plan to implement this Declaration, developed by UNESCO as per the responsibility assigned by the Declaration, Objective 5 is to protect linguistic heritage by expanding the use of minority languages in communication and information-sharing, while Objective 10 seeks to promote digital access to all information publicly available and linguistic diversity in cyberspace.\textsuperscript{73} These priorities were reiterated in the General Assembly resolution 57/249 entitled Culture and Development, which encourages Member States to raise public awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity in regards to cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{74}

Another important international framework for addressing language as a tool of culture is the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted on 17 October 2003 and recognizes intangible cultural heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, [and] skills” that groups and communities deem an integral part of their culture and history.\textsuperscript{75} The Convention protects intangible culture, including language and oral traditions, as the foundation of cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{76}

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\textsuperscript{64} Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*, 2007, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} UN General Assembly, *Culture and Development (57/249) [Resolution]*, 2003.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

**Role of the United Nations System**

The UN system, mostly through UNESCO, plays a vital role in promoting linguistic diversity within and among Member States; the “Endangered Languages Programme” of UNESCO aims “to support communities, experts and governments by producing, coordinating and disseminating tools for monitoring, advocacy, and assessment of language status and trends.”\textsuperscript{77} UNESCO also offers services to support different stakeholders in developing policy, while also facilitating information-sharing and offering technical knowledge and training.\textsuperscript{78} In order to achieve its goals, UNESCO partners with entities within the UN system, most notably the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which also considers the importance of mother tongues in its approach to education.\textsuperscript{79} As an example of a private partnership, UNESCO advocated the use of non-Latin domain names to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and was able to sign an agreement in 2009 to expand access to domain names for different language groups, such as Arabic and Chinese.\textsuperscript{80} ICANN became responsible for developing greater domain possibilities, while UNESCO took the responsibility to inform Member States about these developments, encourage participation by other relevant UN agencies, encourage their network of linguistic experts
to become involved, and to create working-groups to continuously strategize how to increase participation by less-developed states. This is an example of the role UNESCO plays in multilingualism internationally, and the impact it is able to have when working in collaboration with different entities.

In its interdisciplinary approach to addressing linguistic diversity, each thematic branch of UNESCO is responsible for addressing this issue as it relates to its specific mission. For example, the work of the Communication and Information Sector of UNESCO promotes information-sharing and communication, such as through increasing access to information and communication technology (ICTs) in various languages and promoting media usage in minority languages. Meanwhile, the specialized sector of natural sciences works to increase communication between scientists and institutions across languages, including through translating and disseminating scientific materials in a variety of languages. “Taking another approach, the “Major Programme of Social and Human Sciences” promotes the idea of languages as a human and cultural right. These three examples of UNESCO branches showcase the unique approaches taken to carry out a comprehensive course of action in preserving linguistic diversity.

The Role of Language Preservation in Schools

Public education systems have historically been the cause of much loss in linguistic diversity. However, the 1992 Declaration on Minorities addressed this by expressing the right of all minorities to have instruction in or be taught their native language whenever possible. Today, public educational systems can play a key role in revitalizing language diversity within Member States, through various strategies that can be utilized by school systems, chosen based on factors including the number and location of minority language speakers. There are a few dominant models that can be implemented in schools, including total-immersion programs, when the addressed language is the only language used in the school setting, and bilingual programs, in which some classes will be held in the local language, while others would be conducted in a more common or official state language. The total-immersion model can be effective but requires significant resources and enough native speakers of the language to utilize as

77 UNESCO, UNESCO’s Endangered Languages Programme.
78 Ibid; UNESCO, UNESCO and ICANN sign partnership agreement to promote linguistic diversity on Internet [Website], 2009.
80 UNESCO, UNESCO and ICANN sign partnership agreement to promote linguistic diversity on Internet [Website], 2009.
81 Ibid.
83 UNESCO, Language and Multilingualism in Today’s Knowledge Societies [Website].
84 UNESCO, Building Bridges of Knowledge [Website].
85 UNESCO, Exploring the Language Dimension of Social Development and Human Rights [Website].
88 Ibid.

teachers; it also can be criticized for failing to prepare those students to participate in national and international forums and the economy without the state language. The bilingual, or partial-immersion, programs are advocated for by UNESCO and UNICEF in the organizations’ reports and recommendations to states, as is “multilingual education,” a term coined in 1999 for educational programs that use three languages: the local language, a regional or state language, and a world language. The Education Sector of UNESCO encourages and facilitates multilingualism and the preservation of mother languages in the educational system by advising policymakers, promoting teacher competence in addressing this issue, and aiding in the development of written educational materials in a variety of languages. While it is beneficial for allowing dominant and minority languages to coexist without competition, a potential challenge to these methods is the reduced efficacy when too little time is devoted to teaching any of the languages; however, these programs remain the most common and feasible.

The aforementioned Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity highlights the importance of allowing education that respects one’s culture and to participate fully in cultural life, including using diverse languages. In the
accompanying Action Plan to implement the Declaration, UNESCO strives to facilitate multilingualism in all levels of education.\textsuperscript{55} The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted on 20 October 2005, also reiterates “the fundamental role that education plays in the protection and promotion of cultural expressions” and cultural diversity, showcasing the need for diverse languages in schools.\textsuperscript{96}

**International Mother Language Day**

Since 2000, UNESCO has observed International Mother Language Day on 21 February to celebrate the importance of different mother languages and linguistic diversity, especially as it relates to the role schools play.\textsuperscript{97} After a recommendation by UNESCO from the 30th session of the General Conference in 1999, the General Assembly adopted this date while calling upon Member States to “promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world.”\textsuperscript{98} Each year, UNESCO selects a specific theme that relates to mother languages.\textsuperscript{99} In 2013, the theme was “Mother tongues and books - including digital books and textbooks.”\textsuperscript{100} This highlighted the importance of producing books and digital materials in more local languages to encourage the development of such languages and enable schools to teach literacy in a mother tongue.\textsuperscript{101}

**Linguistic Diversity and Indigenous Peoples**

Today, indigenous populations around the world are most affected by language death.\textsuperscript{102} New generations of indigenous persons “will either choose not to learn or will be deprived of the opportunity to learn [the] ancestral language.”\textsuperscript{103} For some indigenous groups, previous generations had made the decision to abandon their culture’s language or were forced to do so, which many see as detrimental today.\textsuperscript{104} The pool of speakers of many indigenous languages is becoming increasingly smaller as local languages are replaced by official state languages or international access languages.\textsuperscript{105} When deprived of the opportunity to practice their languages in a thriving community, the richness of the language is lost, as native speakers forget idioms, grammatical complexities, and words.\textsuperscript{106} In some cases, communities have taken active roles to both retain and revive their native language, but without widespread support, they face many challenges.\textsuperscript{107}

Indigenous groups are most vulnerable to language death because of colonialism, geographic isolation, and sometimes small population sizes.\textsuperscript{108} The UN Independent Expert on minority issues, appointed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and tasked with enhancing the work of all UN bodies as it relates to minority issues, has linked language preservation for indigenous and minority groups to human rights.\textsuperscript{109} The expert reiterated the important linkage between preserving indigenous languages and allowing indigenous groups to retain their unique cultural identities, especially for communities who are marginalized, discriminated against, and socially

\textsuperscript{90} Grenoble & Whaley, Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization, 2006, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p. 55; Ball, Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual or Multilingual Education in the Early Years, 2011; UNESCO, UNESCO Education Position Paper: Education in a Multilingual World, 2003, p. 27; UNESCO Executive Board, Protecting Indigenous and Endangered Languages and the Role of Languages in Promoting EFA in the Context of Sustainable Development, 2008, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{92} UNESCO, An Integrated Approach to Languages and Multilingualism [Website].


\textsuperscript{94} UNESCO General Conference, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{97} UN General Assembly, Multilingualism (A/RES/56/262) [Resolution], 2002; UNESCO, Draft Report of Commission II (30/COM.II/5), 1999.

\textsuperscript{98} UNESCO, International Mother Language Day: Books for Mother Tongue Education [Website].

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} Harrison, When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge, 2007.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 3.

excluded.\textsuperscript{110} Language is important to indigenous communities as it serves as a vessel to pass on cultural traditions and traditional knowledge.\textsuperscript{111} In addition to the aforementioned economic gains from indigenous knowledge, supporting indigenous communities in their local languages is also critical to promote a deeper understanding of the natural world, as much knowledge about biodiversity is encapsulated in local languages and is lost when those oral traditions and cultural heritage are devastated.\textsuperscript{112}

Additionally, new challenges facing indigenous groups are emerging in the digital age with the permeation of the Internet and technology throughout our daily lives.\textsuperscript{113} One key example of this would be the use of languages in cyberspace; of thousands of languages known to exist, only 60 languages are used on the Internet, thus excluding many from critical technology.\textsuperscript{114} Indigenous peoples around the world have been enhancing their access to ICTs, sometimes partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental bodies, intergovernmental organizations, other indigenous groups, or the private sector to achieve their goals.\textsuperscript{115} For example, over 130 Native American tribes throughout the United States of America and Canada have gained access to certain technologies in their tribal languages, such as through smart phone applications that serve as digital dictionaries or through partnering with a private company.\textsuperscript{116} However, a large divide still remains and disadvantages indigenous groups, requiring further action to be taken by the international community to address this concern.\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{Case Study: Australia}\n
According to UNESCO, Australia has a current total of 108 endangered languages, representing a concerning proportion of the 145 indigenous languages in use in the country today.\textsuperscript{118} Australia serves as a historical example of “cultural assimilation,” as the territory of indigenous groups saw a large influx of Europeans, and their individual cultures became homogenized and changed due to the incoming dominant cultural forces and even violence.\textsuperscript{119} Today, the government recognizes the importance of preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages, and has a National Indigenous Languages Policy, which includes financial support of indigenous language instruction in schools and the promotion of “good practice.”\textsuperscript{120} After a 2012 investigation by the Australian government into the state of indigenous languages throughout the country, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{106}] Harrison, \textit{When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge}, 2007, p. 5.
\item[\textsuperscript{107}] Ibid., p. 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] Crystal, \textit{Language Death}, 2000, p. 77.
\item[\textsuperscript{110}] United Nations, \textit{Protection of Minority Languages Is a Human Rights Obligation, UN Expert Says} [Website], 2013.
\item[\textsuperscript{111}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{112}] UNESCO, \textit{UNESCO’s Endangered Languages Programme}.
\item[\textsuperscript{113}] UNESCO, \textit{Languages Matter?} [Website].
\item[\textsuperscript{114}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{115}] Borrero, \textit{Indigenous Peoples, WSIS, and Emerging Uses of ICTS}, 2013.
\item[\textsuperscript{116}] Ibid; Thorton Media Inc., \textit{Language Tools for Indian Country: Thornton Media, Inc.} [Website].
\item[\textsuperscript{117}] Borrero, \textit{Indigenous Peoples, WSIS, and Emerging Uses of ICTS}, 2013.
\item[\textsuperscript{118}] Sengupta, \textit{Endangered Languages: Some Concerns}, 2009, p. 17; Australia, \textit{National Indigenous Languages Policy} [Website].
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Australia, \textit{National Indigenous Languages Policy} [Website].
\end{itemize}

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs compiled a report for the public and the government that highlights successes in the country, as well as specific areas that need to be further addressed, such as recruiting and training indigenous language interpreters.\textsuperscript{121} Although revived and preserved languages may no longer exist in their original state, there is potential for indigenous languages to continue as reliable forms of communication.\textsuperscript{122} Australia serves as an example of the complexities of linguistic diversity and how many elements of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity overlap, including indigenous rights, public schools, access to technology, and public and private initiatives.
Conclusion

The threat to linguistic diversity is one that UNESCO must continue to address, as the detrimental effects of language loss can already be felt.121 However, there is much hope in language revitalization programs. Furthermore, once a language has disappeared from use, there is potential for it to become revitalized and regain a base of speakers, the most successful, although unique and unlikely to be repeated, example of which is Hebrew.124 Although it had lost its function as a spoken language and was used exclusively in religious texts, it was revived and is now the native language of over five million speakers, most notably in Israel.125

Another element worth considering is the issue of multilingualism in the diaspora. The diaspora of a culture provides simultaneous challenges and possibilities to linguistic diversity. For certain languages that were thought to be nearly extinct, discovering native speakers living in the diaspora can provide an opportunity to record, document, and/or teach such a language.126 However, it also marks an extra challenge because communities no longer live together and do not have the opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue.127 Delegates should therefore ask themselves how Member States and UNESCO can approach this component of language preservation effectively.

Preserving linguistic diversity is a complicated issue for which no single solution, program, or framework can exist to address the diverse needs of different languages that are currently in threat. Thus, it is important for delegates to understand the nuances of potential solutions.128 As national policy can have a large impact on communities within that state, what role can UNESCO play in assisting Member States to develop policies that allow for languages to be revitalized, specifically in the realm of education and language policy?129 How can Member States and the UN as a whole better support indigenous groups, school systems, and other stakeholders to promote linguistic diversity and maintenance of diverse mother languages? How can resources and technical expertise be better allocated and shared? How can access to modern technology in diverse languages be both utilized and expanded?

It will be essential for delegates to understand what role this issue plays in their state. They should ask themselves what the state they are representing does in order to address the loss of linguistic diversity? In what ways has it been successful, and what are the challenges it still faces? While UNESCO and many Member States have made exceptional progress in preserving and promoting linguistic diversity, much potential remains to enhance the work of the international community on this pressing issue.

121 Australia, Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities Pamphlet, 2012.
124 Ibid., p. 64.
125 Ibid., p. 64.
126 Roberts, Listening to (and Saving) the World’s Languages, 2010.
127 Ibid.
129 Ibid., p. 25.

This source gives information on the specific situation in Australia. It deals with language learning in the indigenous community and the challenges they have to face. It also discusses recommendations on how to address the subject and the role the Australian government can play. For delegates, this example could be helpful in order to get a better understanding of possible approaches to the topic.


This source deals with bilingual and multilingual education and the importance language has for children. It will help delegates to get a better understanding of the challenges of effective language policies in early childhood. In the chapter on good practices and lessons learned, delegates can find ideas for their own approaches to the subject. The recommendations for UNESCO policy guidelines will also be beneficial for delegates to review and consider in order to address the issue.
Delegates may wish to read this article as a starting point for learning about the use of ICTs by indigenous groups and some of the different models used. This is a topic of emerging importance on which delegates may wish to conduct further research. The author proposes a number of recommendations on promoting use of ICTs in indigenous communities, some of which may be relevant to delegates in brainstorming how to promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

Harrison, K. (2007). When languages die: the extinction of the world’s languages and the erosion of human knowledge. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. This book is an excellent resource for delegates wishing to deepen their knowledge about linguistic diversity as it goes into much detail about the topic. The book discusses the detrimental implications of language loss, and engages in the debate about what is lost every time a language dies. Harrison profiles many different examples of endangered languages throughout the world in different communities.

This article is a good resource for students as it provides an overview of many of the themes discussed in this section of the Background Guide, showing how interconnected linguistic diversity is with broader issues of cultural diversity and survival. Hornberger frames the issue as a human rights issue, and analyses multiple examples from around the world. These will provide delegates with multiple perspectives and approaches to linguistic diversity promotion.

This website offers an interactive map of current vulnerable world languages, as defined and monitored by UNESCO. The different languages are categorized on a spectrum to illustrate how vulnerable they are, and allow delegates to see if there are languages at risk of extinction in the state they are representing. This provides a useful overview of the current state of the world’s endangered languages.

This New York Times article sheds light on the status of endangered languages for communities living in the diaspora. The article focuses specifically on New York City and the plethora of languages present in the city, as well as efforts being taken to preserve languages, even some, which had previously been assumed extinct. This situation can be viewed as an example of an issue that affects many communities around the world and may prove interesting and fruitful for delegates to research further.

This is a critical document in understanding UNESCO’s approach to cultural diversity, of which linguistic diversity is a key component. The Declaration articulates the right to one’s own mother tongue as a human right, which is an important cornerstone to the UN’s work on multilingualism. In addition to the Declaration, the document also contains an Action Plan that guides UNESCO’s work in promoting linguistic diversity. This will show delegates what some of UNESCO’s priorities and current actions are.

This source provides an informative overview on the various challenges of the education system when it comes to linguistic diversity and multilingualism. It discusses minority and majority languages and deals with the linguistic rights. Furthermore, it describes the challenges and benefits of bilingual and multilingual education. For delegates it will be especially helpful to read about the various international documents and UNESCO decisions on this matter.

The General Assembly prioritizes multilingualism and linguistic diversity in this resolution. The resolution reaffirms the importance of the six UN languages on an equal basis. The resolution also welcomes certain decisions of UNESCO, such as declaring International Mother Language Day, which is an important aspect of the UN’s work on multilingualism. This resolution can help delegates understand how UNESCO interacts with the greater UN system in its commitment to preserve linguistic diversity.


UNESCO created this Convention in order to articulate what constitutes “intangible cultural heritage,” including languages and oral history as such. The Convention is important in understanding the broader context of cultural heritage, as it is a key emphasis of UNESCO’s work. The Convention highlights some of the challenges of preserving cultural diversity and cultural heritage in a rapidly globalizing world.


This Web Site gives a good understanding of linguistic diversity on the Internet and the challenges and chances that come along with the new developments in the digital world. For delegates this could be interesting as this is a very new aspect of the topic that will constantly gain importance in the future of our globalized world. Besides the Website also provides background information and facts on languages and endangered languages in general.

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69 UNESCO, *Languages and Multilingualism: Languages Matter!* [Website].
70 Ibid.
71 Crystal, *Language Death*, 2000, p. 34.
73 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 7.
77 UNESCO, *Languages and Multilingualism: Languages Matter!* [Website].
II. Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies in Order to Protect UNESCO World Heritage Sites

“In today’s interconnected world, culture’s power to transform societies is clear. Its diverse manifestations – from our cherished historic monuments and museums to traditional practices and contemporary art forms – enrich our everyday lives in countless ways. Heritage constitutes a source of identity and cohesion for communities disrupted by bewildering change and economic instability. Creativity contributes to building open, inclusive and pluralistic societies. Both heritage and creativity lay the foundations for vibrant, innovative and prosperous knowledge societies.”

Introduction

The cultural and natural heritage of the peoples of the world is invaluable – representing our collective progress over generations; capturing important milestones in history; and illustrating the incredible diversity and fragility of our environment. As the world faces increasing challenges ranging from the global economic crisis to climate change, it is crucial to identify, protect and preserve this heritage in order for it to outlast.

The concept of “heritage” is articulated as “our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations.” This includes both “cultural” and “natural” heritage, which are “irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration.” “Cultural heritage” is created by humans – and can include buildings or artifacts, which exemplify human values or concepts of universal significance. “Natural heritage” includes naturally-occurring natural phenomena, or outstanding examples of biological and ecological processes as well as biological diversity. Examples of sites, which are considered examples of our heritage include the Serengeti in East Africa, the Pyramids in Egypt and the Baroque cathedrals in Latin America.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to assume responsibility for protecting our heritage by establishing “World Heritage Sites,” (WHS), which are outstanding examples of either cultural or natural heritage. The creation of the concept of WHS was done in recognition of the unequivocal role that culture plays in fostering a sense of responsibility and how it can provide the essential historical context to ensure growth and development for the good of a state. The World Heritage List was established pursuant to Article 11 of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The sites added to the list are determined by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) to have “outstanding universal value.” Further, they provide significant socioeconomic benefit to their host nations, and are an irreplaceable source of educational material.

Created to preserve and protect these sights and the culture they embody, the places on the World Heritage List continue to face new challenges. In particular, these sites face heightened threats due to the increased impact of climate change on global environmental stability and the risk posed by armed conflict. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is the “concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and reduce the causal factors of disasters.” DRR includes measures to reduce the impacts of hazards, to strengthen the preparedness and prevention mechanisms and to improve the management of land and environment. Disaster management, disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness are thus all instruments within DRR and contribute to

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130 UNESCO, Protecting Our Heritage and Fostering Creativity [Website].
131 UNESCO, About World Heritage [Website].
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 UNESCO, About World Heritage [Website].
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNTS 151), 1972.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
144 UNISDR, What is Disaster Risk Reduction? [Website].
145 Ibid.
sustainable development. In order to ensure heritage is protected in situations of disaster, DRR strategies should be reflective of the need to protect WHS.

**International and Regional Framework**

There is a range of instruments and international documents that guide this topic and deal with the various aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) including disaster relief preparedness and protecting cultural heritage in situations of emergency.

In order to protect and preserve global heritage and its universal importance, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* in 1972. The Convention gave an unprecedented priority to recognizing the value of global heritage and the need to preserve it for future generations. Further, it created the World Heritage Committee (WHC), which has developed more extensive and detailed plans for preserving the World Heritage Sites (WHS) and determines the criteria for new WHS to be added to the list.

A number of international treaties and subsequent conventions have increased the efficiency and practicality of disaster relief preparedness. *The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* was adopted during the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in response to the earthquake and tsunami that struck Southeast Asia. This is the key international framework for disaster risk reduction and reaction. It has facilitated the development of more specified plans, including the *Strategy for Risk Reduction at World Heritage properties (2006)* and the *Revised Strategy for Risk Reduction at World Heritage properties (2007)* prepared by the WHC. These documents outline the plan of WHC and UNESCO to purposefully strengthen the protection of World Heritage and thus support sustainable development by integrating concerns regarding heritage into national disaster reduction policies. They further purposefully and appropriately allocate the use of emergency assistance from the World Heritage Fund. The World Heritage Fund, developed through the Convention, combines compulsory and voluntary donations with private donations to fund emergency disaster relief projects for WHS.

UNESCO offers coordination and advice to governments and organizations in their efforts to establish early warning and risk mitigation systems for natural hazards and also supports strategies for improving education and awareness in this field, especially in regions and communities at risk in least developed countries. In its 34th session the UNESCO General Conference included disaster mitigation in the Organization’s *Medium Term Strategy for 2008-2013* and thus made it one of fourteen Strategic Programme Objectives. In this Medium-Term Strategy UNESCO determined to “assist Member States in building capacities to withstand and cope with natural events.” Furthermore, it stressed the need for interdisciplinary platforms that could manage disaster risks. UNESCO plays an important role in strengthening local capacities in emergency preparedness as it for example supports Flood Early Warning Systems in Pakistan and Namibia. Furthermore, UNESCO aims at mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the education sector and has launched various initiatives in this direction.

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146 UNISDR. *What is Disaster Risk Reduction?* [Website].
147 UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNTS 151)*, 1972.
149 UNESCO, *The World Heritage Committee* [Website].
152 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties* [Website].
153 Ibid.
154 UNESCO, *World Heritage Fund* [Website].
156 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
158 Ibid., p. 21.
Role of the United Nations System

This topic sits at the nexus between disaster-focused agencies within the UN system and efforts to protect natural heritage. UNESCO works with a variety of partners in this field including the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), many regional actors and governments as well as civil society organizations.160

Disaster Risk Reduction
The United Nations (UN) work diligently through many of its agencies to both prevent and react to disasters. In the most direct capacity, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) works with Member States to prevent significant instability in the face of disaster by coordinating, campaigning, advocating and informing the public in order to adequately prepare for disaster relief.161 Their programs to educate civil servants and the general public about disaster risk reduction are separated into global, regional and national levels.162 The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is a biennial forum held to improve the implementation of disaster risk reduction by strengthening communication and coordination among all actors.163 The most recent forum was held in May 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.164 This session was regarded as the largest and most manifold to date, which shows that disaster risk reduction outreach has achieved results.165 The topics discussed included various aspects such as targeting the root causes of risk; recognizing the private sector as partner; strengthening scientific and technical support; or leading at the local level.166

Protection of Heritage
The World Heritage Committee (WHC) co-sponsors technical workshops on the international and national level to train civil servants and World Heritage Sites (WHS) staff on responding to and preventing damage from disasters and further encourages these staff members to learn from their heritage sites as a means to mitigate future man-made or natural disasters.167 The WHC also provides financial assistance for emergencies and preventive care through the aforementioned World Heritage Fund, and aids in Conservation and Management Assistance for endangered sites.168

The UN places a conscious effort on the promotion of sustainable development and, as thus, the WHC and UNESCO held a Consultative Expert Meeting on World Heritage and Sustainable Development in Brazil in February 2012 and the theme for the commemoration of the Convention’s 40th anniversary in 2012 was “World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Communities.”169 For WHC, it was important that the essential role that heritage plays in encouraging sustainable development was recognized and that the international community received a better understanding for how sustainable development can protect these sites from degradation through prevention of disaster.170 Further, UNESCO and the WHC partner with many organizations on an international and national level in order to provide increasingly available information for Member States on protecting cultural and natural heritage sites in their respective States.171 These partnerships are important in order to develop and implement projects, raise public awareness and share “good practice” and know-how.172 One example of such a successful joint program is the UNESCO Chair Program on Cultural Heritage and Risk Management held by the Institute of Disaster Mitigation for Urban Cultural Heritage; this program focuses directly on disaster mitigation in urban environments.173

160 UNESCO, Partnerships [Website].
161 UNISDR, What we do [Website].
162 UNISDR, Who we work with [Website].
163 UNISDR, About the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction [Website], 2013.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
168 Ibid.
169 UNESCO, How the World Heritage Convention contributes to sustainable development [Website].
171 UNESCO, Partnerships [Website].
172 UNESCO, What partners do [Website].
Finally, UNESCO provides a multitude of educational materials via the Internet to encourage knowledge of all endangered World Heritage Sites.174 Beside the World Heritage List, there is also the List of World Heritage in Danger, which was created in order to draw attention to the threats cultural heritage sites often face.175 Adding World Heritage Sites to this list also leads to the possibility of the WHC to allocate assistance through the World Heritage Fund.176 Furthermore, the inscription to the list requires the WHC to take measures in accordance with the respective state.177 Some of the most recent entries to the list are the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve in Honduras, which was added in 2011 because of various factors such as illegal logging and illegal occupation; the Tomb of Askia, which was added in 2012 due to the violent conflict in the country; or the six World Heritage Sites in Syria, which were added in 2013 because of the turmoil that already led to damage of cultural heritage in Syria.178

**Types of Disasters and The Effect on World Heritage Sites**

It is essential to recognize the importance of protecting World Heritage Sites (WHS) from damage by disasters in order to extend the life and increase the value of their contribution to global culture and heritage, socioeconomic growth and stability, and to solidify their contribution to communities.179 Due to the varying nature of the WHS, it is important to recognize the multitude of situations in which these sites could be disturbed; each type of disaster requires unique prevention and protection measures.180 A disaster is defined as “a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.”181 The most commonly faced disasters are categorized as hydrological, geological, astrophysical, biological, human-induced and climate change.182 Within these categories, there can be man-made or natural disasters as well as a combination of both.183

**Natural Disasters**

Natural disasters are the consequences of natural hazards, which are “naturally-occurring physical phenomena caused by either rapid or slow onset events having atmospheric, geologic and hydrologic origins at the global, regional, national or local scale.”184 Among these natural disasters are earthquakes, floods, volcanic lava flows, tsunamis, droughts, and landslides.185 According to the *Case Studies on Climate Change and World Heritage* report by UNESCO, “the twenty-first century has seen the emergence of ‘new’ kinds of threats in climate change.”186 The severity of these disasters is increasing due to climate change, and fragile ecosystems are facing unprecedented differences that compromise their value as World Heritage Sites.187 A pertinent example of this is the Chan Archeological Site in Peru, whose structures are fragile and can quickly be damaged by natural erosion.188 Climate change and especially the impacts of the El Niño event in 1998 posed a severe risk to the site, thus an emergency assistance fund was allocated to establish protection measures and succeeded in containing the impacts.189

**Human-made**

Disasters caused by humans, such as fires caused by arson, vandalism, or armed conflicts can have irreversible consequences to WHS.190 UNESCO already has experience with coordinating actions to preserve cultural sites in

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174 UNESCO, *List of World Heritage in Danger* [Website].
175 UNESCO, *World Heritage in Danger* [Website].
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 UNESCO, *List of World Heritage in Danger* [Website].
179 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties* [Website].
181 Ibid., p. 8.
182 Ibid.
183 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties* [Website].
184 UNESCO, *Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation* [Website].
185 Ibid.
189 Ibid., p. 38.
these situations, for example in Mali, Libya or Iraq during the violent conflicts that took place in those regions. Another example is the old city of Dubrovnik in Croatia, which was damaged by artillery fire during the war in former Yugoslavia in 1991. The site was then added to the List of World Heritage in Danger, but could fortunately be repaired and rebuilt by the Croatian Government with technical and financial assistance from UNESCO. In 1998, the site could be removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger and thus is a good example for a success story. One of the most recent examples of a crisis threatening World Heritage Sites can be observed in Syria. The crisis that has been occurring in that country for several years resulted in the placement of six WHS to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2013. These issues was viewed as so significant that it was even the topic of discussion within the UN Security Council as an element of the security situation. The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova averred the aim of UNESCO to protect the Syrian WHS and thus held an expert meeting on the matter at UNESCO’s headquarters with the goal to develop an action plan. Furthermore, UNESCO continues its efforts to raise awareness of the threat and provides information on the current status. It also trains Syrian and regional professionals in measures to preserve properties and collections from destruction, looting and illegal trafficking.

Combination of Natural and Human-made Disasters
In many cases it is obvious whether a hazard is natural or human-made, for example when it comes to hurricanes or armed conflicts. However, there are also situations where assumed natural disasters are caused by human activities such as felling trees, building houses in areas prone to floods, or conducting mining. The Doñana National Park in Spain for example was highly affected, when in 1998 a supporting wall of a reservoir containing toxic waste of a mine suddenly burst. The vast quantity of toxic mud and water entered the Agrio River, which also leads to the swamps in the National Park and polluted them. In order to contain this ecological disaster, an International Expert Meeting on the Regeneration of the Doñana Watershed took place in October 1999 and discussed the further actions that should be taken.

Disaster Risk Management to Mitigate the Impact of Disasters
The 2010 Resource Manual: Managing Disasters Risks for World Heritage focuses on putting the aforementioned Strategy for Risk Reduction at World Heritage Properties into the hands of those working directly with these properties, as well as serving as an invaluable contribution to the work of other stakeholders. Site managers and heritage administrators are provided with a methodological framework to identify, evaluate and reduce risks to World Heritage Sites (WHS). Mitigating the impacts of disasters on WHS and effectively responding to emergencies can be accomplished by preventing hazards from becoming disasters thorough maintenance, adequate training programs, and educational initiatives. This is also important because disasters usually cause immense costs, posing severe burden on the respective states, which can be limited by appropriate preventive risk management.

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192 UNESCO, Success Stories [Website].
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
195 UNESCO, UNESCO Director-General deplores the escalation of violence and the damage to World Heritage in Syria.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 UNESCO, Disaster for Doñana – a Spanish World Heritage Site.
202 Ibid.
204 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
205 Ibid.
Historical and Scientific Impacts

World Heritage Sites (WHS) provide us with unparalleled access to our national and international culture and history and they can teach us about how our ancestors and our environment have weathered, recovered or failed to recover from disasters.\textsuperscript{208} For example, learning from the foundations of buildings that have withstood tragic storms, or studying the habitation of plants and animals in majestic forests and habitats can teach current populations how to more effectively react to and recover from disasters and their effects on WHS.\textsuperscript{209} This knowledge can also help to reduce unknown inherent risks at properties, because scientifically evaluating the properties and learning more about the ecosystems surrounding them will help property managers and civil servants to reduce risk and implement site-specific policies and procedures to prevent degradation or elimination.\textsuperscript{210}

Socioeconomic Impacts

World Heritage Sites hold intrinsic value for their host states in promoting economic development.\textsuperscript{211} Primarily, these sites provide value through tourism and employment opportunities for citizens.\textsuperscript{212} By properly staffing and providing for these sites, Member States can increase job opportunities for qualified citizens in the field of securing the property against negative impact by disaster.\textsuperscript{213} Proper maintenance of these sites can also increase the flow of visitors, thereby providing an increase in revenue for both the site maintenance, but also for the state and regions where these properties are.\textsuperscript{214} Also, WHS attract those studying the intricacies of heritage and therefore increase the overall socioeconomic value of communities through increased knowledge of the sites.\textsuperscript{215} These economic and social incentives for maintenance by Member States and regions further stabilizes these sites against disaster, and additionally can provide assistance in helping Member States recover economically from unforeseen disasters through economic stability provided by raising employment rates and positive economic growth.\textsuperscript{216}

International Assistance

Once a disaster has occurred, may it be due to natural hazards or because of human-induced actions, and a WHS is in danger, the Convention offers different ways of international assistance through the World Heritage Fund.\textsuperscript{217} One way is through emergency assistance, which can be requested to address potential dangers that WHS face for example land subsidence, fires, floods or violent conflicts.\textsuperscript{218} This assistance is meant for sudden threats and does not concern cases of gradual destruction such as damages by pollution or climate change.\textsuperscript{219} Emergency Assistance was for example granted to the Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuaries in China after the major earthquake in the region in 2008.

If there has been a disaster, but the current danger is over, the Conservation and Management Assistance comes into action.\textsuperscript{221}

Case Study: Sumatra (Indonesia)

The Tropical Rainforest Heritage in Sumatra was added to the List of World Heritage in 2004, because it holds a great potential to permanently preserve the diverse wildlife of Sumatra including endangered species.\textsuperscript{222} The site embraces three Indonesian national parks: Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP), Kerinci Seblat National Park and Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park.\textsuperscript{223} Furthermore, the Tropical Rainforest Heritage provides biogeographic evidence of the evolution of Sumatra and thus is of universal value.\textsuperscript{224} In 2004, South-East Asia was hit by a massive

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{211} UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
\textsuperscript{212} UNESCO, Managing Disaster Risks for World Heritage, 2010, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{216} UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{222} UNESCO, Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra [Website].
\textsuperscript{223} UNESCO, Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra [Website].
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
tsunami, which although it did not directly affect the ecosystem of the Gunung Leuser National Park, still had a heavy impact on the Park by majorly damaging its infrastructure and concerning human resources. The Nature Conservation Agency Aceh Office in Banda Aceh and several other resort offices were destroyed, which of course affected the ability to protect and manage the property. More than 150 staff members working in the forestry agency were victims of the tsunami. Local and national governments were confronted with a massive destruction of houses and infrastructure and thus were under great pressure to allow logging within the property. Thus, the extreme needs of the surrounding communities lead to a reduced protection of the World Heritage Site and increased deforestation for example caused further risks through flash floods or landslides. UNESCO and other organizations and governments such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Indonesia, the Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation of Indonesia (PHKA) or the Spanish Government became active in this situation by raising awareness of the alarming degree of forest destruction. As a result of these efforts, plans to further exploit the National Park were rejected and alternative solutions for reconstruction were discussed. UNESCO and PHKA worked together on a two-year project to mitigate post-tsunami environmental threats to the National Park and especially the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra.

After UNESCO had offered its help to the Indonesian government, the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry requested emergency assistance from the World Heritage Fund in order to restore necessary capacities in the Gunung Leuser National Park. This was approved by the World Heritage Committee in July 2005 and USD 66,600 were given for a project of the Indonesian authorities in collaboration with the UNESCO Office in Jakarta. Indonesia was asked to prepare an Emergency Action Plan that should especially focus on illegal logging, agricultural encroachments and proposed road development. The Emergency Action Plan covered a five-year period (2007-2011) and addressed the most pressing issues such as illegal logging, poaching and promotion by providing programmes strategies, time-frames and responsible stakeholders. However, the Emergency Action Plan was only slowly implemented and had to be extended for another five years. Among the actions that had been taken were a logging moratorium by the Governor and increased forest patrols by rangers, which resulted in a decrease of illegal logging as well as legal actions against illegal poachers, which helped to improve the situation.

This case shows how crucial it is to find ways to deal with cultural heritage after disasters, as there can be an immense pressure to exploit protected regions during the recovery phase. Therefore, area managers together with international and non-governmental organizations, play a key role in raising awareness in local communities and among politicians and businesses. They need to be prepared for their tasks through education and training in order to be able to take the right decisions in situations of emergency.

Conclusion

World Heritage Sites are contributors to international cultural and natural heritage; yet their value is not limited to the scope of culture and nature, but spans to economic and social benefits to Member States. The international

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226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
242 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Reducing Disasters Risks at World Heritage Properties [Website].
community has found a comfortable consensus on the essential nature of protecting these properties from disasters, and further has worked diligently together to thwart disaster through preventive measures and reactionary measures.

Delegates should challenge themselves to find new ways to educate the general population about the importance of the cultural and natural WHS that are within their states. Further, they should expand upon the concepts put forth in the disaster risk management (DRM) manuals and ask themselves: How can the international community learn from its heritage and continue to increase efforts towards a more sustainable future? How can the damage of cultural heritage in situations of violent conflict be prevented? What actions should be taken once World Heritage Sites are in danger? What measures has your government been taken in order to preserve cultural heritage and how can these cases be role models for other states? World Heritage Sites provide not only a window to the past to appreciate and remember, but also a way to move forward and prevent disasters and destruction from the lessons of our past.

III. Empowering Citizens through Universal Access to Information

Introduction

The conviction that lasting, meaningful peace must be based on the recognized human dignity and human rights of all individuals regardless of nationality, religion, sex or gender is at the heart of the United Nations’ (UN) work to promote stability, create peace, and further justice.204 Among its many initiatives, the UN, as demonstrated by the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is committed to advancing the free flow of all types of information, thereby making information and knowledge available to all.205 Access to information is crucial to the recognition of human dignity and the spread of human rights because information and knowledge underscore human development and realizing human potential; information and knowledge can be passed down for human survival, ensure sustainable development, and improve quality of life.206

205 Das, Open Access to Knowledge and Information: Scholarly Literature and Digital Library Initiatives - The South Asian Scenario, 2008, Forward.
206 Moeller, Ammu, Lau, and Carbo, Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators, 2011, p. 7.
Berger, Freedom of Expression, Access to Information, and Empowerment of People, 2009, p. 88

The international community, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other avenues, acknowledges that, "one of the ultimate goals of any society striving for human development is the empowerment of all its citizens through access to and use of information and knowledge."207

Despite broad international agreement on its importance, universal access to information is still contentious in UNESCO General Assembly debates because knowledge and information is largely controlled and produced by the developed world.208 Even with the proliferation of the Internet and mobile communication technologies, universal access to information is still severely lacking in areas of both developed and developing countries due to political repression, lack of technological access, and poor governance.209 Moreover, due to globalization and the digitalization of information, even with access, many individuals lack the skills to process, understand, and utilize the increasing amounts and of information available.210 Therefore, the UN and UNESCO must work towards the achievement of universal access to information by improving education and building global partnerships.

The Role of UNESCO

UNESCO promotes universal access to information and builds on existing international consensus.211 Specifically, Article 19 of the UDHR states that access to information and sharing information are part of freedom of opinion and expression, while Article 27 stresses that sharing information is linked to participation in cultural life and the sharing in scientific advancement.212 These derive from similar statements in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which forms the basis of the UN’s work.213 Access to information is also central to current goals of the UN because it underscores the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Declaration on the Right to Development.214 Additionally, as of 2006, at least 65 different access to information statutes exist in the world and numerous constitutions and courts have also upheld the right to information and the freedom of information in a multitude of ways.215 Based on this framework, UNESCO collaborates with a wide variety of public and private organizations in unique multi-stakeholder partnerships to create a global movement for change and action.216

Knowledge Societies

In order to focus on the human dimensions of information and communication, UNESCO has developed the concept
of a “knowledge society” and made building inclusive knowledge societies one of the body’s five overarching goals. A knowledge society is a society that is “inclusive, pluralistic, equitable, and participatory.” Knowledge societies are based on universal access to information as well as “equal access to quality education for all, cultural and linguistic diversity, and freedom of expression.” A knowledge society goes beyond a traditional society and cannot be geographically; YouTube, for example, is a knowledge society. The knowledge society concept is based on the realization that new information and communication developments, especially from new media and the Internet, would affect societal structures and values systems. UNESCO has led a paradigm shift on the vital role of information, knowledge, and communication on achieving not just economic development, but human development. At the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, “the concept of knowledge societies was

220 Catts and Lau, Towards Information Literacy Indicators, 2008.
229 Moeller, Ammu, Lau, and Carbo, Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators, 2011, p. 8.
232 Kuhlen, Ethical Foundations of Knowledge as a Commons, 2010.
emphasized as all-embracing and more conducive to empowerment than the concepts of technology and connectivity.”

For this empowerment to occur, UNESCO builds knowledge societies through the creation of enabling environments able to facilitate universal access to information and knowledge. This work includes: “setting standards, raising awareness and monitoring progress to achieve universal access to information and knowledge.”

While building roads would be considered “infrastructure,” UNESCO considers these efforts as creating “infrastructures” or the structures that would allow individuals and governments to share and receive information. UNESCO and the Information for All Program has created a “National Information Society Policy: A Template” which outlines how these societies can be built.

**Partnerships and Global Framework**

UNESCO is a key-player in the UN backed World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and acts as a lead coordinator and facilitator along with the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the United Nations Development Programme in order to achieve the goals of the WSIS. The WSIS has met twice and adopted the *Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action* (2003) and the *Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda* (2005). The *Geneva Declaration* articulated world leaders’ desire and commitment to build a “people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life [...]”

These WSIS documents, in turn, helped to shape UNESCO’s *Mid-Term Strategy (C/4)* for 2008 to 2013 as well as many goals and programs.

**Information for All Programme**

In 2001, UNESCO developed the Information for All Programme (IFAP), the first and only intergovernmental program focused on achieving universal access to information. The IFAP focuses on information literacy, information preservation, and information ethics to achieve knowledge societies.

UNESCO has reaffirmed its support for information literacy by endorsing the *Alexandria Proclamation* of 2005, which claims that information literacy is a basic human right in the digital world because people need to use and create information for attainment of personal, social, job-related, and educational goals. Concerning its second focus, UNESCO’s commitment to information preservation parallels its efforts to protect cultural heritage demonstrated through protection of World Heritage sites and is reflected in particular in its Memory of the World Programme.

In addition, IFAP can aptly debate and highlight the fact that access to information is not simply about providing telephone lines and government liaison offices, but it is fundamentally a moral and ethical question about what people deserve, who has access, and the revolutionary nature of modern information.

**Access to Information as a Tool for Empowerment**

As explained above, the concept of a knowledge society is an effective way to think about the relationship between access to information and empowerment because an “inclusive, pluralistic, equitable, and participatory” society would be created if all citizens were empowered. Empowerment is frequently an unclear concept, but it is most broadly defined as “a process whereby individuals and groups of people become stronger and more confident in...”

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controlling or exerting influence over the issues affecting their lives.”

A process of realization, empowerment is a constructed concept consisting of personal, organizational or group, and community empowerment. As such, the basis of access to information as a tool for empowerment occurs because of the intrinsic value of information. This occurs, as the 2010 Human Development Report stresses, because gaining information and knowledge through sharing and education promotes creativity and imagination, making people feel more valued. Feeling valued leads individuals to feel empowered and as though they have the authority and right to exercise power.

**Applying Access to Information: Economic, Social, and Cultural Change**

Though access to information forms the basis of empowerment, further empowerment occurs as citizens exercise power to create economic, social, and cultural changes. Specifically, access to information can lead to empowerment and then help improve economic standing, overcome knowledge-gaps, and improve health and environment policies. For example, universal access to information helps in “bridging the knowledge gaps between privileged and under-privileged communities.” Individuals of marginalized groups may therefore benefit from greater social inclusion. Society as a whole also often benefits when individuals can access information about their profession, gain vocational skills, or learn the true value of their goods. Access to information also allows people to gain a heightened level of awareness about their health and their environment. This promotes general social welfare and public health and safety, as “citizens become better able to make informed decisions about their daily life, their environment, and their future.” As a result, individuals and communities become empowered as they realize they can control their development and resources.

UNESCO programs, including community centers, library programs, radio programs, and outreach campaigns, seek to overcome the “digital divide” whereby developing countries may lack the structural and technological resources that make access possible. For example, the Open Access Movement in India seeks to make information available in digital libraries that serve as knowledge banks for citizens, indigenous people, communities, and institutions. This program places government and research publications as well as folklore and cultural information online in databases. Citizens may then consult such databases in community centers to learn more about new techniques in their field, projected crop prices, their unique cultural heritage, and much more with the intent that, armed with such knowledge, citizens will feel empowered to make changes and improve their quality of life.

These programs may do a lot to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries, but they still face numerous efficacy and implementation challenges. Firstly, societies may lack not just technological and physical infrastructure, but they may also lack teachers, librarians, archivists, and other professionals that support access to information by teaching or uploading documents. Creating this human capacity, is a long-term project that is not easily achieved. Secondly, though literacy rates are increasing, until universal literacy is achieved, citizens may

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243 Moeller, Ammu, Lau, and Carbo, Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators, 2011, p. 7.
249 Das, Open Access to Knowledge and Information: Scholarly Literature and Digital Library Initiatives - The South Asian Scenario, 2008, Forward.
250 Das, Open Access to Knowledge and Information: Scholarly Literature and Digital Library Initiatives - The South Asian Scenario, 2008, Forward.
251 Catts and Lau, Towards Information Literacy Indicators, 2008, p. 6.
252 Catts and Lau, Towards Information Literacy Indicators, 2008, p. 6.
lack the basic reading and writing skills needed to access information.\textsuperscript{253} Finally, even if citizens are literate, the majority of information may not be in their native language, which is why UNESCO has strongly supported multilingualism and, in particular, multilingualism online.\textsuperscript{254}

Considering 80\% of the globe now lives in areas covered by mobile networks, these structural factors are increasingly problematic because of the proliferation of mobile communication technologies.\textsuperscript{255} However, this coverage creates a new problem; the public sphere is now flooded with information, leaving individuals confused about how to sort, analyze, and evaluate what they hear and read.\textsuperscript{256} People now also need to be information literate, meaning they must “recognise their information needs; locate and evaluate the quality of information; store and retrieve information; make effective and ethical use of information; and apply information to create and communicate knowledge.”\textsuperscript{257} In this way, the digital divide is now more about the differences between urban and rural areas as individuals in urban areas are more likely to gain these skills.\textsuperscript{258}

In an effort to combat these problems, information literacy has been proclaimed by the IFAP as a basic human right. Scholars also draw attention to the fact that information literacy allows citizens to meaningfully contribute to society and is important in the creation of strong civil societies, control over communities, and empowerment.\textsuperscript{259} They also stress that access to information underpins many of the MDGs such as combating disease and enhancing employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{260} Other innovative solutions have been developed, such as speech recognition programs.\textsuperscript{261}

These solutions, however, do not address many greater concerns. For example, some experts argue that the building of new cyber-cafes or libraries may not effectively lead to clear socioeconomic changes or impacts.\textsuperscript{262} This is because reports have shown no clear link between public access and downstream impacts.\textsuperscript{263} Similar concerns exist for mobile technology.\textsuperscript{264} Moreover, many societies, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, have education systems that conflict with, and do not support, the ideals of a knowledge society.\textsuperscript{265} Furthermore, while it may be easy to measure literacy, measuring information literacy is more difficult, and there are only emerging indicators and ways to quantify and evaluate achieving high levels of information literacy.

**Applying Access to Information: Political Change**

In addition to creating economic, social, and cultural changes, access to information may empower citizens to seek broader political change. Open flow of information can lead to greater governmental transparency, making it harder to hide corruption and misuse and making it easier for citizens to assert their interests, resist exploitation, and overcome human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{267} Because of this, political change occurs because information and communication form the basis for engaging in democratic systems by building communities and strengthening of civil society.\textsuperscript{268}

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\textsuperscript{256} Moeller, Ammu, Lau, and Carbo, *Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators*, 2011, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{257} Catts and Lau, *Towards Information Literacy Indicators*, 2008, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{258} Catts and Lau, *Towards Information Literacy Indicators*, 2008, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{259} Catts and Lau, *Towards Information Literacy Indicators*, 2008, p. 10.


\textsuperscript{266} Catts and Lau, *Towards Information Literacy Indicators*, 2008, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{269} Moeller, Ammu, Lau, and Carbo, *Towards Media and Information Literacy Indicators*, 2011, p. 7.
This is how access to information forms the basis of democracy and democratic transitions and why nearly all democracies recognize the right of access to information.269

Support of e-government is one way in which many actors hope access to information will lead to democratization and governmental reform through less corruption, increased transparency, convenience, revenue growth, and cost reductions.270 E-government attempts to transform the nature of politics and relations between government and citizens by providing access to information and improving governmental delivery of services, business and industry interactions, and government management.271 There exist numerous case studies on implementing e-government, which frequently include computerization and uploading governmental documents online, creating government websites, and even increasingly politicians blogging online.272 This approach is often highly praised in developed and developing countries, but, because programs frequently replicate models of e-government that work in the developed world without considering infrastructure limitations and high telecommunications costs, the efficacy of such programs is questioned.273 The issue may be, though, simply that there is a gap between the approach and the system, but not the overall idea.274

Developing e-government systems, however, does not address the reasons why many citizens do not have access to information in the first place. Namely, individuals must also have the opportunity to access information through diverse media outlets; in addition, political will and a framework for open and pluralistic media and sharing of information must exist.275 Instead of this occurring, many governments refuse to consider the benefits of making public information universally available.276 For example, governments are committed to limiting the information available to individuals through Internet censorship.277 Even in democracies, leaders frequently intervene in online networks at more frequency to authoritarian regimes, though authoritarian regimes are more likely to use Internet shut down as a tool for governance.278 The Iranian “Twitter Revolution” demonstrated how governments are fearful of the potential for access to information.279 More egregiously, restrictive political systems may discriminate against certain ethnic groups or marginalized communities economically or culturally.280 Refusing to acknowledge or publish documents in unofficial, indigenous, or minority languages has significant detrimental effects on minority and marginal group access to information and empowerment, as demonstrated by the lack of information in Spanish available to many immigrant communities in the United States.281 Certain cultures also may discriminate against women; some societal norms limit female access to information and specifically access to information and communication technologies.282 Many citizens are turning to new mobile communication and social networking technologies when they do not have access to information easily; these platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, allow independent sharing of information and can lead in governmental change.283 However, use of these technologies may be limited by the many factors explained in the previous section.

279 Shirazi, The Emancipatory Role of Information and Communication Technology: A Case Study of Internet Content Filtering within Iran, 2010.
282 Shirazi, The Emancipatory Role of Information and Communication Technology: A Case Study of Internet Content Filtering within Iran, 2010.
283 Catts and Lau, Towards Information Literacy Indicators, 2008, p. 22.
Conclusion and Further Questions

Information forms the basis of human existence and has the ability to rapidly empower individuals and societies. Failing to work towards universal access to information risks entrenching a new class of individuals who are information poor because they are disadvantaged from limited freedom, information practices, and lacking information assets to empower themselves. As the work of UNESCO and the IFAP in particular stress, work to address this must acknowledge that access to information is a human right, that societies have an obligation to promote empowerment through universal access to information, and that this is fundamentally an ethical question. Additionally, achieving citizen empowerment must prioritize programs and determine the best ways to address current implementation and efficacy concerns. More broadly, as demonstrated by debates concerning the role of the digital divide and development world in controlling information, adequately addressing the universal access of information must recognize the ongoing contradiction between the right of universal access to knowledge and information for everyone and the commercial interest of privatization and scarcity of resources that define globalization. As such, delegates ought to consider how to overcome current barriers towards universal access, balance the public domain of knowledge and intellectual property, prioritize funding concerns towards achieving this goal, and engage all Member States as well as the private sector.

Finally, the international community must realize that while universal access to information has the ability to empower citizens, information access will not solve anything and can have negative impacts. In the first place, the international community must realize that universal access is necessary for development, but is not sufficient in and of itself: access to information will not “bring instantaneous literacy, cure diseases, feed the hungry, or eliminate poverty.”

How can UNESCO and the Member States of the United Nations address these problems in conjunction with increasing access to information? What steps can be taken to ensure that infrastructural problems do not exacerbate the information wealth gap? How can the problem of information literacy be addressed?