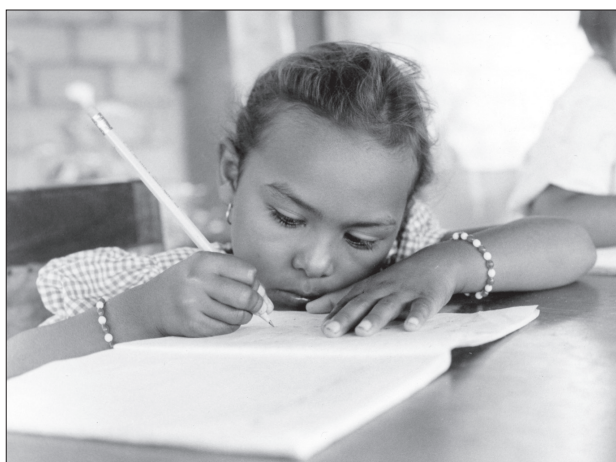


POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: EDUCATION

If indigenous peoples are to enjoy their universal right to education, there are a number of constraints and concerns that need to be addressed. The post-2015 development agenda offers a unique opportunity for indigenous peoples to address what they see as key priorities and the way forward for education beyond 2015. This briefing note has been prepared by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in collaboration with Tebtebba and with contributions and advice from indigenous peoples and experts,¹ and is intended as a discussion paper for stakeholders in the post-2015 development process.



Indigenous peoples and formal school education: constraints and concerns



While the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on Education has shown the most progress out of all the MDGs, indigenous peoples still lag far behind when it comes to fully enjoying the right to formal education. The education gap between indigenous peoples and mainstream populations remains critical: rates of enrolment, retention, completion of and performance at primary school level are significantly lower and gender disparities are often pronounced. Indigenous educational deficits range from generalized exclusion to limited access to the upper levels of primary and secondary education, with admittance to higher education still being the exception.²

Indigenous peoples' acute educational marginalization is closely connected to a number of interlinking factors, such as poverty (child labour), ethnicity (social stigma and institutionalized discrimination), language barriers, gender-based discrimination, traditional practices (including early marriage), and a lack of access to basic services due to their geographical isolation. To this must be added the following factors, which

also negatively affect indigenous peoples' access to formal education:

- Lack of or deficient school infrastructure in the areas where they live;
- Lack of mobile schools and/or culturally-adequate boarding facilities for nomadic and semi-nomadic indigenous children;
- Financial burden imposed by tuition fees and the indirect costs of education (materials, uniforms, school meals, transport);
- Lack of qualified bilingual teachers and learning materials written in the learners' mother-tongue;
- Poor learning conditions (shortage of desks and chairs, poorly lit and ventilated classrooms) and unsafe school environments (discrimination, physical abuse, gender violence).
- Militarisation in indigenous territories disturbing the daily cycle and the instilling fear affecting children's education including the use of community schools as military detachments.

The major shortcoming, however, is that formal school systems rarely reflect the realities of indigenous livelihoods or traditional educational systems:

- Most national curricula tend to ignore indigenous peoples' history, cultures and languages; textbooks and other educational materials reflect the values, norms and traditions of mainstream society.
- Formal school education is provided in the national language, and the languages of indigenous peoples - as well as their traditional knowledge and skills - are ignored or devalued.



- School terms and daily schedules do not take into consideration indigenous peoples' livelihood, for example, pastoralism and nomadism.
- The methods for imparting instruction and class discipline clash with those commonly practised in the students' home or community (where, for example, they refrain from using corporal punishment³ or embarrassing children in front of others).
- Most non-indigenous teachers are not prepared to teach in indigenous communities (lack of cultural training and understanding of indigenous peoples' values and ways of life).
- Elders and community members are not involved in setting the direction or educational goals of the school.

These shortcomings have negative impacts and many indigenous peoples worldwide share traumatic school experiences. To name but a few: being separated from their families and living far away in unfriendly and unsafe boarding schools; being socially stigmatized and abused by fellow pupils; learning foreign systems of knowledge in a language other than their own; and being taught by teachers from cultures that are different from, and dominant to, their own. Many indigenous peoples have come to see formal school education as a way of assimilating them into mainstream society and eradicating their cultures, languages and ways of life. This often causes cultural and generational conflicts between youths and elders, and threatens the social cohesion in indigenous communities. Many indigenous youths also experience the loss of an important part of their identity in their dealings with mainstream values and norms, while not fully becoming a part of the dominant national society. Research shows that the loss of cultural identity and school maladjustment

are important factors in the high rates of substance abuse and suicide among indigenous youths.⁴

The indigenous path towards a culturally-appropriate and relevant education

Long before State-sponsored education systems were introduced, indigenous peoples had their own systems for managing their knowledge and educating their children. These systems, which are rooted in specific cultural contexts, have allowed them to survive as unique peoples. It is on this basis that indigenous peoples advocate for their right to control their own education systems, i.e., "To provide and receive education through their traditional methods of teaching and learning, and the right to integrate their own perspectives, cultures, beliefs, values and languages in mainstream education systems and institutions. As concluded in EMRIP, the right to education for indigenous peoples is a holistic concept incorporating mental, physical, spiritual, cultural and environmental dimensions."⁵

Although many indigenous peoples live in geographically-isolated, self-sustaining communities, many now also live in villages and towns alongside and among majority populations. This poses mutual challenges, and there is thus a growing recognition of the need for an intercultural bilingual education rooted in one's own culture, language, values, worldview and system of knowledge but which, at the same time, is receptive, open to and appreciative of other knowledge, values, cultures and languages.⁶ It also entails learning the majority language and thereby gaining the opportunity to participate in public life, access higher education, influence political decisions and embrace economic opportunities.



A flexible, inclusive and culturally-relevant educational system based on interculturalism and bilingualism will provide indigenous children with the knowledge and skills necessary to function fully as an effective member of both their own community and mainstream society. If properly implemented, it will contribute to achieving individual and community empowerment.

The legal foundations of indigenous peoples' right to quality education

Education was established as a fundamental human right in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then, the international community has reiterated its commitment to providing quality education to all children, youth and adults in numerous declarations and documents.⁷

Indigenous peoples' specific educational rights, including their right to establish and control their own education systems and to provide education in their own languages, have been stipulated by, for instance, ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989),⁸ the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)⁹ and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007),¹⁰ and confirmed, among others, by the Fourth World Congress of Education International (2004),¹¹ the Preparatory meeting for the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples (Alta outcome document) (2013) and the Lima Declaration of the World Conference of Indigenous Women.¹²

Key priority areas

The post-2015 development framework must aim to achieve culturally-appropriate and relevant education and bridge the education gap between indigenous peoples and mainstream populations in a sustainable manner.

Recommendations for the work with indigenous peoples and education in the post-2015 development framework and the SDGs include the following:

- States must base their education goal, targets and indicators within a rights-based approach that ensures equal access to good-quality education and aims to mitigate the historical and structural causes of inequality which have resulted in the marginalization of indigenous peoples.¹³
 - States must adopt national legislation and policies that ensure that multiculturalism, ethnic diversity and the values of indigenous culture are acknowledged.
 - States must ensure the meaningful and effective participation and the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples in accordance with their protocols in order to reform the dominant education system to reflect the histories, identities, values, beliefs, cultures, languages and knowledge of the indigenous peoples to whom it is being delivered.¹⁴
 - States must establish methods and systems for the collection of disaggregated data and develop indicators in line with international human rights standards in the field of education for the purpose of identifying barriers that prevent indigenous peoples from fully enjoying the right to education and to reform education laws and

policies so that they are more inclusive and sensitive to indigenous values and perspectives.¹⁵

- States must ensure that quality intercultural education is provided at the national and local level with the aim of eliminating discrimination of indigenous peoples in the formal educational system.¹⁶
- The right of indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning, must be respected and supported.¹⁷

States must collaborate with indigenous peoples and ensure their access to culturally-appropriate and intercultural education in their own languages. States must follow a step-wise policy to help promote all indigenous languages and provide funding to support the development of teaching methods, literacy materials and orthographies in the pupil's own language.¹⁸

- States must make indigenous peoples' equal access to good-quality education a top priority. This includes:
 - Accessible school infrastructure and, in the case of nomadic/semi-nomadic communities, mobile schools so that indigenous children do not have to leave their family or their community to go to school.

- The indigenization of school curricula and flexible schedules to accommodate indigenous peoples' educational needs, ways of life and world views. This should be done in government schools and in alternative schools set up and managed by indigenous peoples themselves.
- The provision of intercultural bilingual education by trained bilingual teachers.
- The production and dissemination of bilingual intercultural text books and school materials specifically targeting indigenous pupils and students and taking their point of departure as the context in which they will be used, as far as possible integrating relevant local indigenous knowledge, skills and culture.
- Inter-generational educational approaches as an effective way of maintaining cultural and language practices, as well as transmitting and developing relevant environmental and other knowledge/skills.
- Measures to ensure the provision of education at all levels for indigenous girls and women. This may involve special efforts to develop instruments of dialogue that can help mediate conflicting issues and norms within indigenous societies.¹⁹
- Recognize and promote equal knowledge systems traditional knowledge vs. scientific knowledge. ○

Notes and further reading

- 1 IWGIA and Tebtebba takes full responsibility for the content of this briefing note but would like to give special thanks for the contributions of Dr. Jennifer Hays, anthropologist and research fellow at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, Jane DC. Austria-Young, resource person on community organizing and engaged anthropologist, Frederica Barclay, social anthropologist (M.Sc.), Agnes Leina Executive Director in Il'laramatak Community Concerns, and Diana Vinding, indigenous peoples' expert.
- 2 See, e.g., UNESCO, *Reaching the Marginalized: Education For All Global Monitoring Report*, (2010), chapter 3.
- 3 See, e.g., Jennifer Hays, "Indigenous Rights in Education: the San of Southern Africa in Local and Global Contexts" in *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Southern Africa* edited by Robert K. Hitchcock and Diana Vinding in *Indigenous Affairs* 01/05 (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2005).
- 4 See, e.g., Elizabeth H. Hawkins, Lillian H. Cummins and G. Alan Marlatt "Preventing Substance Abuse in American Indian and Alaska Native Youth: Promising Strategies for Healthier Communities", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 130, No. 2, (2004), pp. 304–323; First Nations & Inuit Health, "Acting On What We Know: Preventing Youth Suicide in First Nations" at ; IWGIA & UNICEF Report *Suicidio adolescente en pueblos indígenas - tres estudios de caso* (2012).
- 5 EMRIP (2009), §3.
- 6 UNESCO, "Reaching the unreached: indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America". Background paper prepared by Luis Enrique

López for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010 *Reaching the marginalized* (2009).

- 7 See e.g., the World Declaration on Education for All (1990); the Dakar Framework of Action, (2000) and the Rio + 20 document "The Future We Want" (2012).
- 8 ILO Convention No. 169, Article 27.3.
- 9 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 30. (1989).
- 10 UNDRIP Article 14 (2007).
- 11 Education International at: <http://pages.ei-ie.org/library/libraries/detail/55>
- 12 The Alta outcome document Articles 6 & 7 (2013) at <http://wciip2014.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Adopted-Alta-outcome-document-with-logo-ENG.pdf>
- 13 UNDG, "Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda". Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda" (2013), p. 32.
- 14 Alta outcome document (2013).
- 15 EMRIP (2009), §18.
- 16 EMRIP (2009), §12.
- 17 UNDRIP (2007), §14; EMRIP (2009), §16, Alta outcome document (2012), § 7.
- 18 EMRIP (2009), §18.
- 19 EMRIP (2009), §20.