

Education
and
Cultural
diversity



Cultural diversity is a perspective that permeates much of



UNESCO's thinking on education and that frames many of the activities that we seek to promote in and with Member States. In the next biennium the reality of our multicultural world forms the focus of our attention as we push forward with our principal priority for 2002-2003, namely progress towards the achievement of Education for All, which the countries of the world have committed themselves to ensuring by the year 2015. This goal can only be reached if we are able also to relate education to the different cultural contexts of learners across the spectrum.

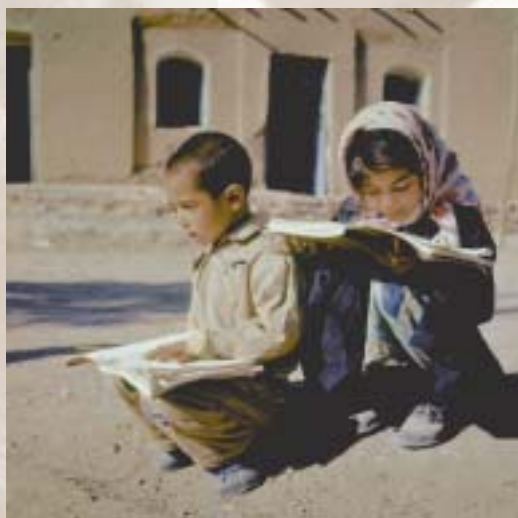
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Daniel". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

John Daniel

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he Education Sector's programme for the coming years reflects UNESCO's concern to protect and enhance the diversity of cultures in the world in the face of a globalizing economy and a society increasingly driven by digitalized knowledge. The multilingual, multi-cultural societies of the twenty-first century in which we live celebrate this diversity and at the same time challenge us to think creatively about the way in which we educate the citizens of the future. While the new technology brings us closer together and creates greater possibilities for understanding and exchange, at the same

time we risk losing the richness and uniqueness of our cultural identities.



Education

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"The urgency of action regarding the achievement of basic education for all is based on the view that, as we enter the twenty-first century, the denial of anyone's right to education – be they child, youth or adult, be they male or female, be they rich or poor – is fundamentally unacceptable. This urgency has become even more imperative due to the impact of globalization and the rapidly expanding role of knowledge, information and communication at the interface between society, economy, culture and technology. More than ever before, education is at the heart of these relationships and is central to all efforts to ensure that knowledge societies are grounded upon considerations of equity, respect for cultural diversity and the protection of the common good."

(Draft Programme and Budget 2002-2003, 31 C/5, para. 01004)

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ducation for All and the follow up to Dakar which is the priority for UNESCO's work in education requires in turn a philosophy of education that encompasses the many cultures, languages and civilizations that inhabit our planet. Only by respecting the language, culture and knowledge of the learner can we together build literate, schooled and educated societies, where lifelong learning is the norm.



Education

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The sector's work "will highlight the values, attitudes and skills necessary to face the complex challenges of contemporary societies (such as a culture of peace, sustainable development, science and technology, HIV/AIDS and ICTs). Moreover, attention will be focused on strengthening those aspects of education that promote the full development of the human personality, especially the linguistic, cultural, physical, intellectual and creative dimensions of learners' well-being."

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01007)





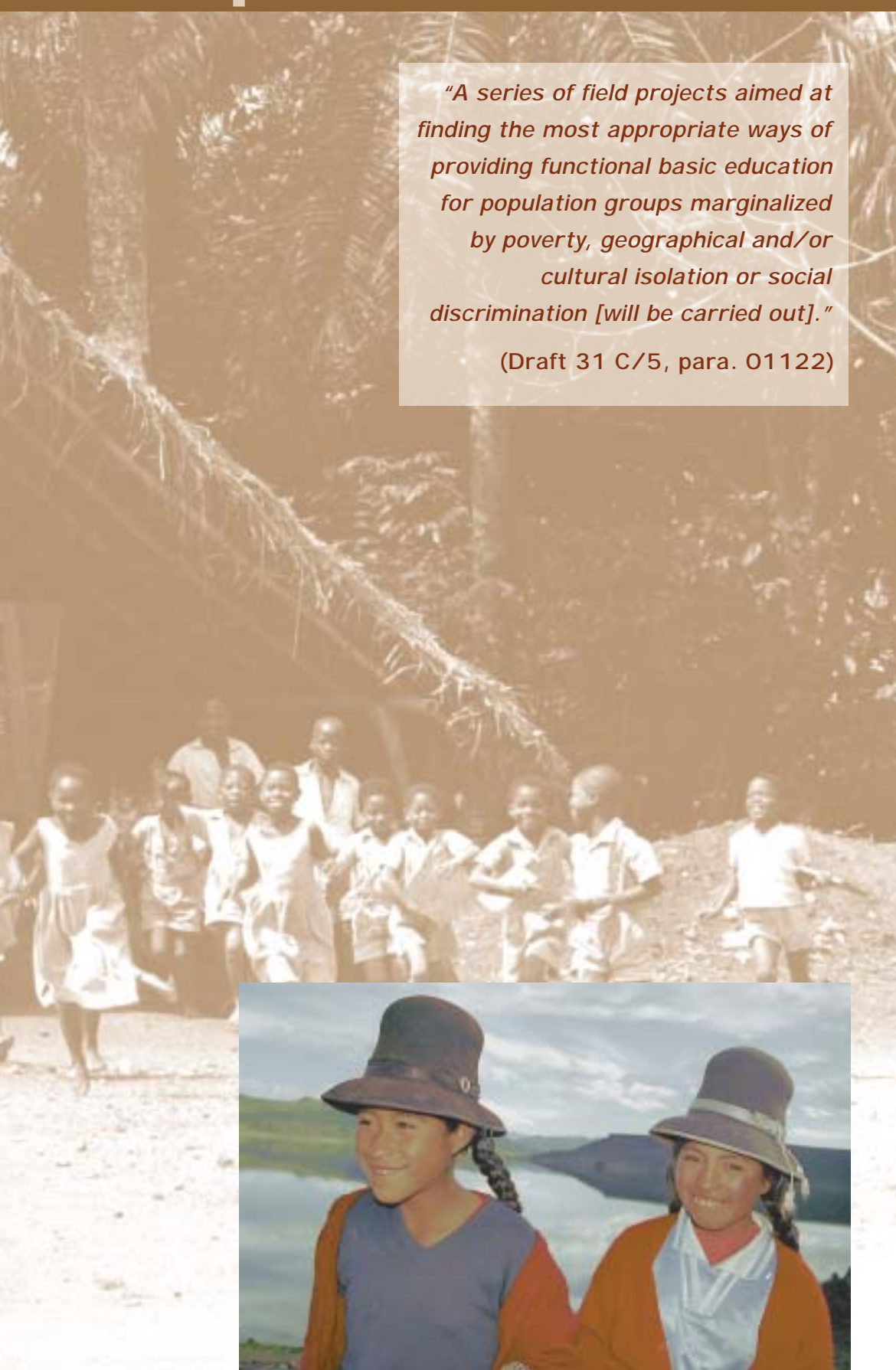
Efforts will be made to ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic groups in educational programmes and to support gender policy development that takes a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, including social, cultural and economic elements. In addition, Literacy for All, which is the focus of the proposed United Nations Literacy Decade, emphasizes the need to consider different kinds of literacies in different cultures. Literacy can no longer be seen as just a technical skill: as simply the ability to read and write. It is also an act of communication, having different meanings in different cultures. UNESCO will support countries to develop effective strategies to implement this multi-faceted approach to literacy.

Specific Actions

"A series of field projects aimed at finding the most appropriate ways of providing functional basic education for population groups marginalized by poverty, geographical and/or cultural isolation or social discrimination [will be carried out]."

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01122)

relating to Cultural Diversity



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n emphasis on building knowledge societies through quality education will also be linked with issues of linguistic and cultural diversity particularly in relation to the maintenance of a culture of peace. Respect for each other through understanding and the development of universal values such as tolerance, democracy, and non-violence imply learning about other cultures and languages and becoming aware of the fact that there are more ways than one of interpreting the world in which we live. UNESCO will encourage issues involving values education in multilingual and multicultural societies to be included within national EFA action plans.



Specific Actions

In particular UNESCO proposes over the next biennium to:

- ✓ contribute to the improvement of curricula and textbooks for the teaching of history;
- ✓ promote dialogue on the role of language and culture as key factors in the development through education of understanding among people within and between Member States;
- ✓ support the educational activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People;
- ✓ disseminate new approaches to language education;
- ✓ support the production of guidelines on mother tongue and multilingual education; and
- ✓ encourage the preparation of culturally appropriate materials in local languages.

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01211)



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he role of culture in relation to education for sustainable development is one that is crucial. As the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka has said: "Culture is the primary source of knowledge [and] the understanding of nature begins with local culture." Many of the world's most endangered ecosystems are home to culturally diverse groups, and the way in which these human societies interact with their environment determines the possibility of a sustainable future in these regions. Ten of the twelve world mega-centers for biodiversity can be found among the twenty-five countries containing the largest number of spoken languages, while of the nine countries that account for 60 per cent of all human languages, six are also centres of high biodiversity.

Specific Actions

relating to Cultural Diversity

“Respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, different systems of belief and indigenous knowledge will figure strongly in the design of local solutions for sustainability, with particular regard to the role played by local languages as a storehouse of knowledge on biodiversity and sustainable development.”

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01212)

Science and technology education (STE) will likewise focus on the culturally diverse contexts in which science is taught.

“As part of the intersectoral project with the Science Sector, Member States will be assisted to improve their STE programmes, particularly in general secondary and vocational schools, aiming at developing socially and culturally relevant teaching methods and curricula.”

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01213)





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ranslated into action this will mean amongst other activities:

- ✓ production and dissemination of a manual on *Policy Guidelines for Developing STE*, resource books on *Best Practices in STE* and *Indigenous Technologies*.
- ✓ STE contests, fairs, festivals, exhibitions, field trips and meetings organized in at least 10 countries.

One of the key priorities of the UN agencies at the present time is to act to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. UNESCO is actively participating in this challenge from the perspective of its preventive education programme which also includes educational strategies against malaria, substance abuse, tuberculosis and malnutrition.

Attitudes with regard to sickness and disease are often culturally prescribed, and it is crucial to understand and deal with these sensitivities when designing educational programmes.

Specific Actions

relating to Cultural Diversity

In this regard UNESCO expects by the end of the 2002-2003 biennium to have "clearly targeted and culturally-sensitive preventive education methods and materials disseminated."

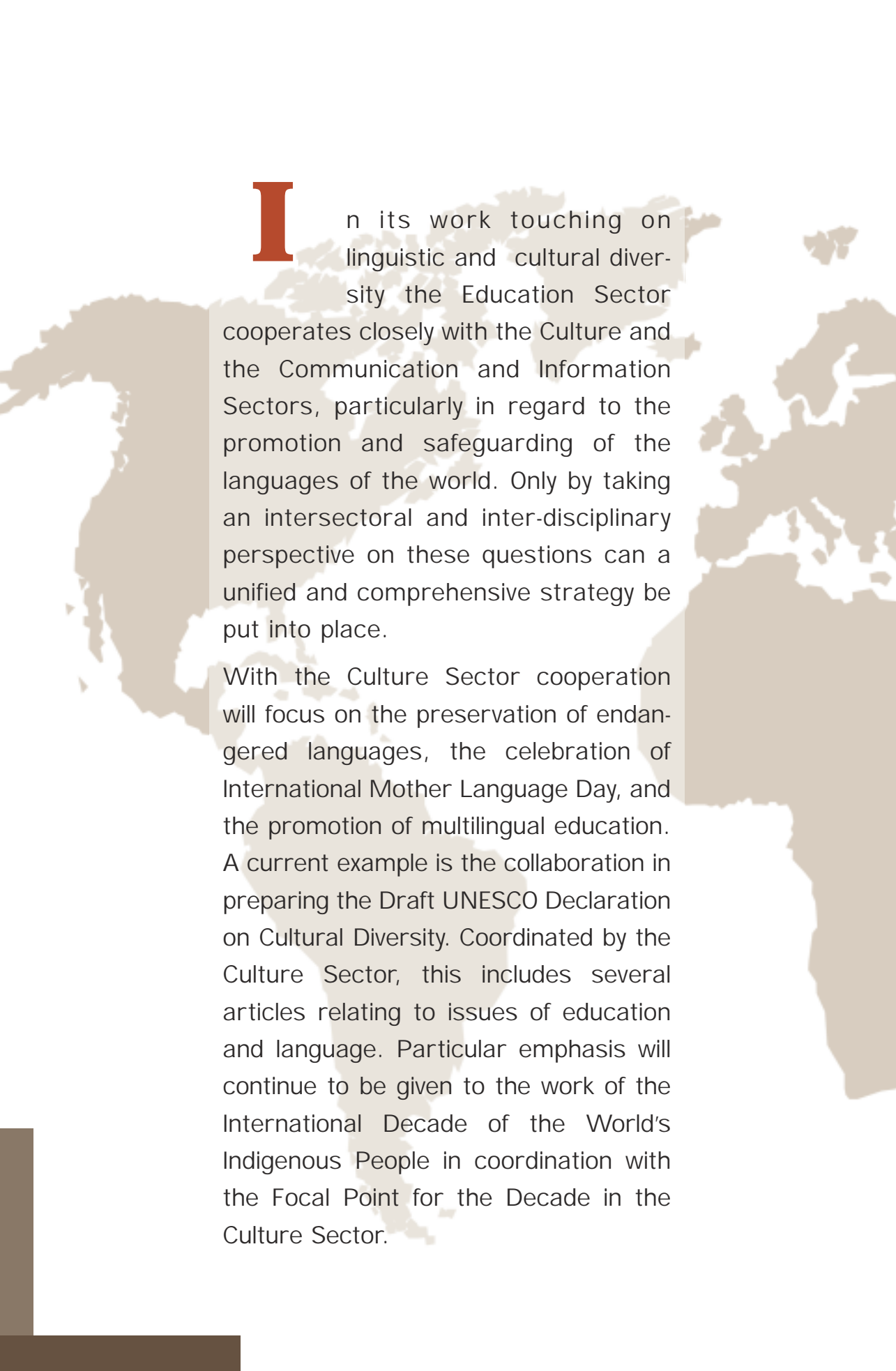
(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01214)

In secondary and vocational education the varying cultural contexts will likewise be a focus.

"Best practices drawn from a variety of social and cultural contexts will be identified, disseminated and promoted, with a particular focus on alternative access routes into general secondary education, education for responsible behaviours, approaches to counselling adolescents, the participation of new education actors and partners, and the renewal of secondary education contents, methods and management (both at central and school levels)."

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 01221)





In its work touching on linguistic and cultural diversity the Education Sector cooperates closely with the Culture and the Communication and Information Sectors, particularly in regard to the promotion and safeguarding of the languages of the world. Only by taking an intersectoral and inter-disciplinary perspective on these questions can a unified and comprehensive strategy be put into place.

With the Culture Sector cooperation will focus on the preservation of endangered languages, the celebration of International Mother Language Day, and the promotion of multilingual education. A current example is the collaboration in preparing the Draft UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Coordinated by the Culture Sector, this includes several articles relating to issues of education and language. Particular emphasis will continue to be given to the work of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People in coordination with the Focal Point for the Decade in the Culture Sector.

Intersectoral Cooperation

With the Communication and Information Sector there will be active collaboration on the [B@bel](#) Initiative which seeks to promote the use of multilingualism on the Internet.

"[The objective of the B@bel Initiative is] to promote the use of multilingualism on the Internet with a view to making access to contents and services more equitable for users worldwide, in particular in developing countries; to support linguistic and cultural diversity on the Internet, prevent linguistic segregation and protect languages in danger of disappearance; furthermore (i) to formulate guiding principles and educative policies on the promotion and use of languages; (ii) to carry out comparative and statistical surveys; (iii) to prepare UNESCO participation in the ongoing development of multilingual resources; and (iv) to disseminate information on policies and strategies adopted by the Member States and international organizations."

(Draft 31 C/5, para. 05421)

To know more about
UNESCO's educational programmes and
activities, please consult the internet
web-site at the following address:

<http://www.unesco.org/education/>



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

