



Convention on Biological Diversity

Distr.: General
15 September 2023

Original: English

Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Twelfth meeting

Geneva, 12–16 November 2023
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

In-depth dialogue: “The role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices”

In-depth dialogue: “The role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices”

Note by the Secretariat

I. Background

1. In its decision [X/43](#), the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity decided to include a new agenda item for future meetings of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention, entitled “In-depth dialogue on thematic areas and other cross-cutting issues”, in order to contribute to the incorporation of Article 8(j) and related provisions as a cross-cutting issue throughout the work undertaken under the Convention and its Protocols.
2. In its decision [15/20](#), the Conference of the Parties decided that the topic for the in-depth dialogue to be held at the twelfth meeting of the Working Group would be: “the role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices”.
3. On 9 March 2023, the Secretariat issued [notification 2023-024](#), by which it invited Parties, indigenous peoples, local communities and relevant stakeholders to provide views on that topic in advance of the present meeting.
4. For the dialogue, submissions were received from Canada, Colombia, Germany and the Sudan, three indigenous people organizations, namely, the Métis National Council, the Nepal Indigenous Nationalities Preservation Association and Sámediggi (the Sámi Parliament in Sweden), and one stakeholder group, Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, on behalf of the CBD Women’s Caucus.
5. The present document is based on the following sources:
 - (a) A compilation of views and comments regarding the in-depth dialogue on thematic areas and other cross-cutting issues;¹

* CBD/WG8J/12/1/Rev.1

¹ CBD/WG8J/12/INF/1.

- (b) The report of the Nature and Culture Summit;²
- (c) A compilation of declarations on the links between nature and culture from the regional conferences and global summits organized from 2010 to 2022;³

6. In addition, document CBD/WG8J/12/6 provides an analysis of the four traditional knowledge indicators in the context of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity, which is of great relevance for the dialogue, as it addresses the indicator on trends in linguistic diversity.

II. Role of indigenous languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge for the effective implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

7. At its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, with the vision of a world of living in harmony with nature by 2050.

8. Specifically, in section C of the Framework, on considerations for its implementation, the Conference of the Parties recognized the important roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities as partners in the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity. The implementation of the Framework must ensure that the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities, and more generally their human rights, are respected. It is also stated in the same section that the implementation of the Framework should be based on scientific evidence and traditional knowledge and practices.

9. Furthermore, Target 21 of the Framework is aimed at ensuring that the best available data, information and knowledge, including traditional knowledge, are accessible to decision makers, practitioners and the public, inter alia, to strengthen communication, awareness-raising, education, monitoring, research and knowledge management. Section K of the Framework, on communication, education, awareness and uptake, contains a call for increasing awareness, understanding and appreciation of the knowledge systems, diverse values of biodiversity and nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, and for the development of communication material that can be translated into indigenous and local languages.

10. In connection with the theme of the dialogue, the Conference of the Parties, in decision 15/10, requested the Executive Secretary to convene an ad hoc technical expert group on indigenous peoples and local communities and the Framework to provide advice on the further elaboration of a new programme of work on, and possible institutional arrangements for, Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention related to indigenous peoples and local communities, and to align the new programme of work with the Framework. Under agenda item 6, the Working Group will be invited to consider the outcomes of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical expert group on the New Programme of Work and Institutional Arrangements on Article 8(j) and Other Provisions of the Convention Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities held in Manaus, Brazil, from 11 to 13 July 2023. For the purpose of the present dialogue, it bears noting that task 2.5 of the draft new programme of work includes the development of communication, education and public awareness materials in indigenous languages on the value and contributions of indigenous, local and traditional food systems and cultural heritage. Similarly, in relation to element 4, on knowledge and culture, of the draft new programme of work, task 4.1 is suggested to support efforts by indigenous peoples and local communities, inter alia, to strengthen the intergenerational transmission, use and revitalization of traditional knowledge.

11. Furthermore, with regard to the role of language in the transmission of traditional knowledge, the Conference of the Parties, in its decision [15/22](#), renewed its commitment to the Joint Programme

² CBD/WG8J/12/INF/5.

³ CBD/WG8J/12/INF/6.

of Work on the Links between Cultural and Biological Diversity. The natural and cultural heritage and diversity are recognized and promoted in the Joint Programme as enablers and drivers of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and a pathway to the vision of the Framework of living in harmony with nature by 2050. Task 3.b of the Joint Programme concerns the facilitation of the development of, support for and implementation of specific efforts to enable indigenous peoples and local communities to record, document, protect and transmit traditional languages and dialects, in particular indigenous languages, with the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples and local communities and with their full and effective participation.

III. Existing international actions for the preservation of indigenous language: International Decade of Indigenous Language

12. The General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages in its resolution 71/178 and the period 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in its resolution 74/135 to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the pressing need for their preservation, revitalization, and promotion at the national and international levels.⁴ The Assembly also invited the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to serve as the lead agency for both initiatives, in collaboration with other relevant agencies, as well as, in the case of the International Decade, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

13. The Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages⁵ has been developed to provide stakeholders with the essential principles for embarking on joint action under the International Decade. The plan comprises various elements, including a conceptual framework, strategies for implementation, methods for monitoring and evaluation, and the delineation of necessary governance structures. It was developed by building on the strategic outcome document of the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages, the Los Pinos Declaration [Chapoltepek] – Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages, the evaluation of the UNESCO action to revitalize and promote indigenous languages within the framework of the International Year of Indigenous Languages and consultations with indigenous peoples, UNESCO member States, academia, civil society organizations, public and private partners, and entities within the United Nations system, among others.

14. The International Decade represents a concerted endeavour to address the significant global challenges confronting indigenous languages and traditional knowledge. The synergies between the International Decade and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework provide an opportunity for the comprehensive integration of indigenous languages into biodiversity policies. The Framework, which includes the joint programme of work, is well aligned with the overarching goals of the International Decade.

IV. Existing international framework for indigenous languages

15. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples serves as a comprehensive legal framework for the rights of indigenous peoples. Article 13 of the Declaration, in particular, is fundamental for linguistic rights, as it explicitly recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to revitalize, use, develop and transmit their languages to future generations. It also provides that States must take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means. In addition, articles

⁴ See <https://en.iyil2019.org/> and <https://idil2022-2032.org/>, respectively.

⁵ UNESCO, document 41 C/INF.14, Annex.

14 and 16 state that indigenous peoples have the right to establish their educational systems and media in their own languages.

16. The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization reinforces the linguistic rights of indigenous peoples, recognizing their aspirations to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain and develop their identities and languages. The Convention also underscores the significance of consultation and consent of indigenous peoples on matters concerning their cultures.

17. Beyond those primary instruments, other international agreements, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, further emphasize the need to maintain indigenous identities, cultures and languages, with a view, in particular, to respect the linguistic and cultural rights of indigenous children.

18. Since its inception, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has also consistently drawn attention to the fragile state of indigenous languages. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs held two international expert group meetings in 2008 and 2016, respectively, that were focused on indigenous languages.

19. Moreover, the Human Rights Council took note of the study undertaken by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights.⁶

V. Analysis of the submissions

20. The submissions received focused on the role of indigenous and local languages in facilitating the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities. Most submitters highlighted the interrelation of indigenous languages and traditional knowledge for biodiversity conservation and the connection of those languages to the traditional territories of the peoples who spoke them. Several submitters emphasized that indigenous languages were integral to both biodiversity conservation and cultural preservation.

21. One of the submitters noted that the revitalization of indigenous languages was clearly linked to cultural diversity. In this context, it was argued that achieving positive outcomes was premised on mainstreaming biodiversity values, preserving traditional knowledge and ensuring the sustainable use of biodiversity. The same submitter further highlighted the role of indigenous languages in underpinning an ethical and philosophical foundation for a human rights-based approach to conservation. In addition, the submitter emphasized the central role of the connections of indigenous peoples to their territories as the basis of their values, culture, spirituality and languages. This submitter noted that protecting indigenous languages was essential to maintain the relationship between those languages and the knowledge that indigenous peoples had of their territories.

22. Another submitter pointed out the importance of preserving the languages of indigenous peoples and local communities, including Afro-Colombians in the context of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. It was emphasized that those languages were integral to the cultural identity and world views of those communities. It was also noted that undermining and discriminating indigenous languages could contribute to their decline and lead to an erosion of cultural vitality. Lastly, the submitter emphasized that language revitalization was essential for fostering the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge within the context of biodiversity conservation.

23. Several submitters recognized the vital role of languages in transmitting traditional knowledge, innovations and practices across generations and societies, while facilitating the social cohesion of their speakers. In this regard, it was noted that language ensured the preservation of cultural heritage, dissemination of knowledge and spreading of cultural awareness. One submitter noted that special

⁶ [A/HRC/21/53](#).

attention should be given to the challenges associated with rapid cultural changes and on how they could be addressed. Reference was made to relevant case studies from the Global Support Initiative for Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities that highlighted the protection and transmission of traditional knowledge, noting that those projects addressed various aspects of traditional knowledge, including the vital role of indigenous and local languages in facilitating biodiversity conservation.

24. One submitter provided an example of a tone language and how its use was intricately linked to land-based practices. In this context, it was observed that the connection between language and land was common to several indigenous peoples. It was suggested that it was important to reflect on ways in which Parties to the Convention could support the revitalization of indigenous languages and the application of indigenous science or traditional knowledge, especially in the context of biodiversity conservation. A reference was made to Métis-led conservation, and it was noted that establishing indigenous protected areas involved revitalizing Michif, one of the languages of the Métis nation, including place names for ecological features, species and land-related practices.

25. One submitter observed that indigenous languages served as the repositories of ancestral wisdom accumulated over generations, which was intertwined with indigenous lands, waters and environment. The submitter pointed out that many indigenous languages were at risk of disappearing owing to historical colonization, assimilation policies and globalization, which posed a significant threat to traditional knowledge. To address that issue, a call was made to the Parties to the Convention and partner entities, including UNESCO, to prioritize language revitalization by providing technical and financial resources to support indigenous-led revitalization efforts to better integrate indigenous language and knowledge into programmes and processes established under the Convention.

26. One submitter noted that the theme of the dialogue was timely within the context of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. References were made to examples of indigenous languages, noting how they intertwined with the landscapes, nature and cultures of indigenous peoples, highlighting the intimate connection between language and the environment.

27. One submitter observed that women and girls from indigenous peoples and local communities played a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and values, noting that mothers and grandmothers often had the socially assigned responsibility of passing on language, ethics and knowledge to younger generations. It was highlighted that such women and girls had developed specialized gender-based traditional knowledge for biodiversity conservation. In this regard, the vital role of women in preserving languages and knowledge typically passed down orally or through practices was highlighted. The submitter called for the use of innovative methods, including technology, to adapt and transmit traditional knowledge more effectively.

VI. Possible elements for discussions

28. The in-depth dialogue will involve presentations by a panel of experts, followed by an interactive dialogue between the panel and the participants in the meeting. On the basis of past practice, the outcomes of the in-depth dialogue will be annexed to the report of the meeting.

29. Participants may wish to consider the following questions:

(a) What roles do indigenous languages play in the transmission of traditional knowledge for biocultural conservation?

(b) What would be the significance of incorporating the revitalization of indigenous languages into the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework?

(c) How can the Framework best contribute to supporting the revitalization of indigenous languages and the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge?

(d) What are the strategies to ensure the prioritization and protection of the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, including spiritual connections to the land, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities within the context of the Framework?

VII. Recommendations

30. The Working Group may wish to recommend that, at its sixteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Conference of the Parties,

Noting that, at its twelfth meeting, the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity¹ conducted an in-depth dialogue on the theme “The role of languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices”.

Also noting that, in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework,² the Conference of the Parties acknowledged the important roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity, their rights, knowledge, including traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, innovations, world views, values and practices,

Further noting that, in Target 21 of the Framework, the Conference of the Parties called for the best available data, information and knowledge, including traditional knowledge, to be made accessible to decision makers to guide effective and equitable governance and the integrated and participatory management of biodiversity,

Recognizing that the contribution of indigenous languages and traditional knowledge to addressing global biodiversity loss is necessary to achieve the 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature,

Also recognizing that diverse languages and knowledge can provide human and ecological systems with greater adaptive capacity to cope with current disturbances and strengthen social and ecological resilience,

Further recognizing the relevance of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity and the process of developing a new programme of work and institutional arrangements on Article 8(j) and other provisions of the Convention related to indigenous peoples and local communities;

1. *Invites* Parties to fully acknowledge the role of indigenous languages in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices among indigenous peoples and local communities and, more broadly, the links between biological and cultural diversity;

2. *Encourages* Parties, other Governments, relevant organizations, indigenous peoples, local communities and stakeholders to incorporate, as appropriate, the revitalization of indigenous languages, given their fundamental role in the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, into the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including through the updating and revision of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and the preparation of their seventh and subsequent national reports;

3. *Decides* that the theme of the next in-depth dialogue shall be “Strategies for mobilizing resources to ensure direct access to funding by indigenous peoples and local communities to support the implementation of the Kunming- Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework”.

¹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1760, No. 30619.

² Decision [15/4](#), annex.