UGRA DECLARATION
ON PRESERVING LANGUAGES
AND PROMOTING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN CYBERSPACE
FOR INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Final Document

of the Global Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace for Inclusive Sustainable Development

(Khanty-Mansiysk, Russian Federation, 4–9 June, 2017)

The Global Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace for Inclusive Sustainable Development was the first-ever international forum to scientifically address the role and impact of multilingualism and linguistic diversity (in real life and in cyberspace) in achieving progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

Holding this meeting has become a significant contribution of Russia and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Ugra to the implementation of the intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) -- UNESCO's programme in the field of communication and information, and also IFAP's new contribution to UNESCO's efforts to implement the SDGs formulated in the universal UN document *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The Global Expert Meeting was organised by the Ugra Government, the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, the UNESCO Intergovernmental Information for All Programme, the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, and the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre.

The event aimed to foster expert exchanges and serve as a platform for the dissemination of innovative theories and pioneer know-how regarding the links and articulations between multilingualism and the sustainable development paradigm, addressing their potential and limitations specifically in relation to the digital presence of languages – the quality, prospects for the existence of such languages, and activities in relevant spheres.

The meeting followed the debates on various aspects of language preservation and the development of linguistic and cultural diversity in cyberspace at the global, regional and national levels. The world saw nine major international themed events in 2008–2016, including five within the framework of the UNESCO Information for All Programme, focused on political, cultural, social, ethical and technological aspects of research and development in the sphere of linguistic diversity in cyberspace and using information and communication technologies (ICT) for language preservation. The results of the discussions at these meetings were reflected in their proceedings and final documents: the Lena Resolution (2008), the Yakutsk Call for Action – a Roadmap towards the World Summit on Multilingualism (2011) and the Yakutsk Declaration on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Cyberspace (2014). These documents were taken into consideration during the discussion of the idea for the UNESCO World Atlas of Languages at the International Expert Meeting on Improving Access to Multilingual Cyberspace at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in 2014 and at the Global Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace convened in Khanty-Mansiysk (Russian Federation) in 2015.

The participants of the Global Expert Meeting assumed the following:

a) Every language is a unique tool for the understanding and description of reality, a fabulously rich store of information about the ethnic entity speaking it, and about ethnic culture, its own evolution, and the nature of man as a biological species. Languages are amazingly abundant and diverse products of human creative reason, precious to their speakers. Languages reflect nations' historical and social experience and serve as tools of individual

socialization and means of self-identification. Languages are also the medium and tool of productive communication in the realization of humanity's work and creative realizations, crucial and indispensable pragmatic functions in socio-economic life.

b) However, in the globalized world, the large part of the some 7,000 existent languages, which are "minor" languages spoken by a small proportion of humanity, are under threat of extinction or their influence is shrinking. "Major" languages spoken by large populations are also facing pressures from a few economically dominant languages. The ability to resist the onslaught of these powerful languages will determine the future of the majority of world languages. It depends on the economic empowerment of these language communities and the development of appropriate language policies, linguistic resources and platforms, notably multilingual cyberspace in which currently only 5% of languages are present.

c) Taking it as a given that language is not only a dimension of culture and identity but also a key component of all societal processes, multilingualism must be considered as an essential operational factor in achieving the posed SDGs in education, urban development, food security, environment, economic growth and sustainable models for production, consumption and building peaceful and inclusive societies.

d) However, the UN document "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" contains only one reference to language. Article 19 emphasizes "the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status."

e) In terms of implementing human rights, linguistic diversity and multilingualism guarantee inclusion, respect for and preservation of identity, quality education, access to information and knowledge, and freedom of expression; they also contribute to economic development and environmental stability.

f) Human interaction in all spheres of activity unfolds increasingly not only in reality but also in the digital world. Cyberspace provides tremendous opportunities for access to information and communication, implementation of the freedom of expression, access to education and dissemination of cultures and is thus a key enabling factor in the realization of SDGs. Therefore issues of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in cyberspace are taking on increasing topicality with regard to inclusivity and access to enable all to take full advantage of these opportunities.

g) Meanwhile, recent developments in terms of ICT, biotechnologies, cognitive sciences and the so-called fourth industrial revolution, as well as their possible implications that could dramatically transform all aspects of our lives, had not been adequately addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

h) Education is a crucial enabler for sustainable development and an essential tool to preserve languages and promote multilingualism. In this context, Open Educational Resources (OER) are a great opportunity for the enhancement of cultural and linguistic diversity. However, the landscape is totally dominated by the English language, and most nation states have no or few OER in their own national and regional/minority languages.

The participants of the Global Expert Meeting on Multilingualism in Cyberspace for Inclusive Sustainable Development,

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Noting that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the world's leaders at the landmark UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015, has the vision of sustainable development focused on the interests of all people and the entire planet,

Being convinced that promotion and protection of linguistic diversity and multilingualism are crucial for humanity and should thus be considered as a determining factor of sustainable development of societies,

Recognizing that the world's regions and communities which are most favorable for linguistic and cultural diversity are at the same time the most disadvantaged from the perspective of economic and social development,

Emphasizing that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development does not spotlight a separate goal or target that would call attention to the fact that languages are central to the global discourse on sustainable development and inclusion, and would directly respond to the demands of particular language speakers,

Urges national governments, UNESCO and other UN agencies managing the achievement of the SDGs, as well as private sector representatives, interested NGOs, scientists, journalists, cultural workers, educators and academics to:

I. Recognize that cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the pillars of the sustainable development model, and its importance for the prosperity of each and everyone, and of the whole planet, is equal to that of economic growth, environmental protection and social integration.

II. Advocate the need to integrate the language-related issues as a significant component in the documents defining and regulating the achievement of the following SDGs:

- End poverty (Goal 1),
- End hunger (Goal 2),
- Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being (Goal 3),
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4),
- Promote sustainable economic growth and decent work (Goal 8),
- Build infrastructure, promote industrialization and foster innovation (Goal 9),
- Reduce inequality (Goal 10),
- Make cities and human settlements sustainable (Goal 11),
- Protect marine and coastal ecosystems (Goal 14),
- Protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems (Goal 15),
- Strengthen and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).

III. Advocate for the inclusion in the global indicator framework for monitoring progress on the SDGs a new, language-related indicator as an important criterion of inclusiveness and disaggregation for the efforts undertaken, along with the already existing indicators related to income, sex, age, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, etc.

IV. Take efforts to update and promote ethical, legal and social principles and norms to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity in cyberspace.

V. Facilitate research aimed at collecting, systematizing and analyzing statistical data related to the use of languages in various areas of social life, especially economic activity, with special attention to languages in education, including open licensed content.

VI. Launch and support initiatives related to the development of literacy in local languages in the context of lifelong education and provision of mother tongue-based multilingual education, and to consider such initiatives as an important component of sound economic policies fostering long-term sustainable development.

VII. Contribute to the expansion of linguistic diversity in the sphere of knowledge production by supporting open access to scientific knowledge, including "gray" scientific literature as one of the alternatives to traditional production of knowledge, and advocating the need to release government-funded scientific translations under open licenses.

VIII. Recommend to UNESCO as the UN agency coordinating activities in 2019, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly the International Year of Indigenous Languages, to attract more world attention to the issues related to multilingualism and linguistic diversity, including, in particular, the following proposals:

1. To intensify the development of the UNESCO World Atlas of Languages in terms of the number of languages represented and in terms of the quality, relevance and correspondence of the data contained therein to the real state of languages and their speakers.

2. To draw the attention of national governments to the fact that national language-related laws quite often lack due execution and, as a rule, do not regulate the use of languages in cyberspace.

3. To empower the creation of a permanent observatory of languages' evolution in cyberspace, in particular to accumulate statistical data, especially on the languages that lack representation or are absent in cyberspace.

4. To encourage the creation of an online multilingual periodical devoted to research and best practices in the sphere of providing access to cyberspace for languages, especially those that are absent from or underrepresented in cyberspace.

5. To support initiatives on training teachers and students to collect and document the vast knowledge in local languages in order to develop digital content, including OER, and disseminate it; to advocate the need to provide schools and universities with appropriate equipment and software.

6. To encourage speakers of the world's least spoken languages to acquire competencies (including media and information literacy) which enable them to create, document and disseminate indigenous knowledge that can be useful to the rest of the world, recognizing it as their unique advantage, as well as to sell their unique content with a focus on content marketing skills.

7. To facilitate the creation of centres of excellence to offer advisory opinion, monitoring and support to local initiatives on linguistic diversity promotion with special attention to translation networks and initiatives to promote the development of translation engines for non-dominant languages.

8. To raise awareness of all stakeholders in the field of the economy of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, in particular on how digital content in a local language can be used to develop and move forward the local economy. Establishing an award for the best projects in this sense can be a good kickoff.

9. To expand work with partner media organizations in order to attract media attention at various levels to the importance of languages in sustainable development initiatives.

10. To strengthen the efforts and facilitate the engagement of the International Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, established in Reykjavik (Iceland) under the auspices of UNESCO as a Category 2 Centre, in the implementation of the abovementioned activities and cooperation with active politicians and international experts particularly to carry out research projects to examine and understand the articulation of multilingualism and linguistic diversity with the achievement of sustainable development goals.

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This document was produced through a collaborative process involving participants from the following countries: Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, India, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Paraguay, Philippines, Russian Federation, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, UK, USA, and Zambia.