



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



MESSAGE

From Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif , Executive Secretary
Convention on Biological Diversity
on the occasion of International Literacy Day, 08 September 2008

For information only

Literacy, a human right, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for social and human development is cause for celebration as there are now close to four billion literate people in the world. However, as we commemorate International Literacy Day today, let us not forget that literacy for all is still an unaccomplished goal.

Because educational opportunities depend on literacy, the Convention on Biological Diversity supports environmental literacy, in particular on biodiversity issues, through its programme of work on Communication, Education and Public Awareness, which aims to: communicate the scientific and technical work of the Convention in a language that is accessible to many different groups, integrate biodiversity into education systems in all Parties to the Convention; and raise public awareness on the importance of biodiversity in our lives, as well as its intrinsic value. To this end, the Secretariat is working in close collaboration with many partners, including with the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Educational Organization (UNESCO), which has been at the forefront of global literacy efforts and is dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional and international agendas.

To support the 2008 International Day for Biological Diversity celebrations, the Convention launched its first educational module on biodiversity and agriculture. The lesson plans and accompanying children's booklet were designed to incorporate the principles of education for sustainable development, in addition to building basic literacy and other skills.

The CBD also embraces action-oriented learning as a literacy tool. For example, through its global biodiversity campaign "*The Green Wave*" young people have opportunities to engage in local action, to build friendships with other participants around the world, to work in local and international partnerships, while learning about global issues affecting biodiversity.

The Convention, through its programme of work on traditional knowledge, places particular emphasis on the important role of the mother tongue in early childhood education as a fundamental requirement for the transmission of traditional knowledge as well as cultural transmission. Full schooling must be achieved fully, taking into account a child's cultural background and principles for indigenous education.

Indigenous women are also the key to the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge through indigenous languages. The Earth shelters approximately 6,000 languages; however, the vast majority of these languages, like the cultures they represent, are threatened with disappearance. Approximately 97% of the population speak about 4% of the languages of the world. Conversely, almost 96 % of the languages are spoken only by 3% of the population and most of those languages are indigenous languages. Moreover, 10% have fewer than 100 speakers. These figures testify to an incredible linguistic and cultural diversity of humanity. Indeed, a child's first language is referred to as his or her "mother tongue" in recognition of the significance of the mother's role in teaching language and passing on knowledge. In recognition of the importance of traditional languages, the General Assembly proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages.



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United Nations
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel : +1 514 288 2220
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

<http://www.cbd.int>
secretariat@cbd.int

Plants, animals and microbes are of immense value to modern medicine, as substances derived from them are used as drugs in treatment of many diseases, including for example quinine and Taxol, a drug used to fight cancer. Biodiversity therefore provides a unique and irreplaceable source for medicines. As we commemorate this year's International Literacy Day with a special focus on the important relationship between literacy and health, the theme for the 2007-2008 biennium of the United Nations Literacy Decade, let us not forget the important role of biodiversity in ensuring universal primary education and in achieving the health goals.

Let us also remember that meeting the goal of universal literacy calls not only for more effective efforts but also for renewed political will at all levels.

Montreal, 08 September 2008