



**21.02.2016 – On International Mother Language Day, UNESCO highlights the importance of mother and local languages as channels for safeguarding and sharing indigenous cultures and knowledge.**

Languages are not only tools of communication, they also reflect a view of the world. Languages are vehicles of value systems and cultural expressions and are an essential component of the living heritage of humanity. Yet, many of them are in danger of disappearing.

It is estimated that, if nothing is done, [half of the 6,000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century](#) . With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.

However, this process is neither inevitable nor irreversible: well-planned and implemented

language policies can bolster the ongoing efforts of speaker communities to maintain or revitalize their mother tongues and pass them on to younger generations.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 focuses on quality education and lifelong learning for all, to enable every woman and man to acquire skills, knowledge, and values to become everything they wish and participate fully in their societies. This is especially important for girls and women, as well as minorities, indigenous peoples, and rural populations.

Mother languages in a multilingual approach are essential components of quality education, which is the foundation for empowering women and men and their communities. We must recognise and nurture this power, in order to leave no one behind, and craft a more just and sustainable future for all.

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