

Committee/Council: Environmental and Cultural Committee

Issue: Promotion of literacy as a means of preserving cultural identity

Student Officer: Oliver Jaggi

Position: Co-Chair

Introduction:

Culture is the power of the people, their method to express themselves and their language. The way they come to realize who and what role they play today, is culture. If we do not respect or strengthen the culture of the people, they become weak, and do not have the opportunity to resort utilization and make-believe-culture is imposed from outside. So strengthening culture is very important. Literacy is such an important aspect of any society because it is the basis of many crucial issues, such as achieving gender equality, general education and extinction of poverty. Literacy is basically the ability to write and read. Nowadays literacy is a basic knowledge to everyone who has visited any sort of school or education center. In MEDCs (more economically developed countries) and lately throughout the past 30 years also in LEDCs (less economically developed countries) the education of literacy starts while being in a young age, usually between 5-8. Nevertheless the ability to write and read is not mandatory in the modern world, especially in some African and Asian countries. In the modern world, however, literacy is not only the ability to write on paper and read books, but also the ability to be familiar with modern technology. Thus without the ability of literacy, not only are you not able to write and read but also not in the position to use a cellphone, laptops, home computers or video games, web-cams or e-books.

Unfortunately according to statistics there is still a serious number of people who can neither write nor read. This phenomenon is called **functional illiteracy** and more specifically, one in every five is functional illiterate and the two-thirds of those consist of women.

But there is also **cultural illiteracy**.

Even when some students manage to attain a degree of functional literacy, they often suffer from a different problem - cultural illiteracy. To be culturally literate means to possess the basic information concerning your cultural identity. For example an astonishing 31.9 percent of seventeen-year-olds in the US do not know that Columbus

discovered the New World before 1750. Almost 75 percent could not place Lincoln's presidency within the correct twenty-year span, and 43 percent did not know that World War I occurred during the first half of the 20th century. Moreover almost one-third of the students could not locate France on a map of Europe, while less than half could locate the state of New York on a map of the United States.

Hence it is highly important that society is reminded of the importance of literacy as a human right and a way to preserve cultural identity. However during these times of crisis, lack of finances resolve in lack of of education, especially in LEDCs and that should be prevented by all means.

Key Term Definitions

Literacy

UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) has defined "literacy" as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Culture

The ideas, the values, the customs, the history, the language, the religion, the arts and the social behavior of a particular group of people or of a society.

Cultural identity

Cultural identity refers to the languages, behaviors, values, practices, customs views that unite groups based on their nationality, region or common interests.

Human rights

Amnesty International has defined human rights as :

Basic rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, or other status.

Human rights include civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty and freedom of expression; and social, cultural and economic rights including the right to participate in culture, the right to food, and the right to work and receive an education.

Human rights are protected and upheld by international and national laws and treaties.

Human development

The UNDP (United Nations Development Program) definition for Human development is “Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices. Enlarging people’s choices is achieved by expanding human capabilities and functioning. At all levels of development the three essential capabilities for human development are for people to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable and to have a decent standard of living”

Background information

Modern situation

According to UNESCO’s Report on Global Trends in Gender Parity:

In 2008, 796 million adults worldwide (15 years and older) reported not being able to read and write and two-thirds of them (64%) were women. The global adult literacy rate was 83%, with a male literacy rate of 88% and a female literacy rate of 79%. More than half of those unable to read and write – 412 millions – lived in Southern Asia and other 176m. illiterate adults were in sub-Saharan Africa. Together, these two regions accounted for three-quarters (74%) of adults unable to read and write worldwide. The adult literacy rate increased by about 8 percentage points globally over the past 20 years – an increase of 6% for men and 10% for women. The situation is really critical especially in Northern Africa and Eastern and Southern Asia, where the rate increased by 20% and 15% respectively. In other regions, adult literacy rates increased since 1990 as follows: Western Asia 11%; sub-Saharan Africa 9%; South-Eastern Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean 7%. In developed regions and CIS ("Commonwealth of Independent States") countries, the increase was negligible as they were already close to universal literacy. .

Nowadays the modern world with its technological progress outcomes has caused a massive loss of interest in cultural norms and traditions. The substitution and exchange of various opinions and views have created a partly worldwide similar view which has caused the loss of interest in the singularity of each culture and focuses more on a general collective modern view on topics. In that way many forget that having a personal cultural identity is vital in order to be able to respect each others differences and origins.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Developing Countries

Developing Countries like India, Vietnam and China have stated their declared intention on preserving cultural identity within their own borders. This means the education of children and young adults will be strengthened and illiteracy rates will begin to sink while more and more people in the society achieve the quality of literacy .

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the MDGF

The United Nations global agency for development was created in 1965 and is represented in 177 countries and territories. They offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.



The UNDP is well-known for its efforts to retain and strengthen Cultural identity. Recently the MDGF Culture and Development Joint Programme was implemented in 150 countries. The Joint Programme between the UNESCO, UNDP, WTO, FAO, UNICEF, ILO and the UNV aims to strengthen the institutional and human capacities to manage cultural and creative development at a decentralized level.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

UNESCO was founded in November 1945 and is the first United Nations Agency. It serves to consolidate “peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and the human rights along with fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the UN Charter.”

The UNESCO has been a big promoter for the preservation of cultural identity and for the amplifying of literacy rates, especially in LEDCs.

One of the mostly known Education Goals is the **EFA** (Education for All) with **six goals** that are:

1) expand early childhood care and education,



- 2) provide free and compulsory education for all,
- 3) promote learning and life skills for young people and adults,
- 4) increase adult Literacy by 50%,
- 5) achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015 and
- 6) improve the quality of education.

United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD)

The UNLD was launched in 2003 and is an UN initiative that is a subordinate for supplying the six EFAs.

In 2003 the upcoming decade was declared with the slogan: "Literacy as Freedom" .

The UNLD is coordinated by UNESCO especially in its international activities throughout the past decade.

2012 is the final year of the Literacy Decade . With the collaboration of other countries the UNESCO will soon start coordinating the evaluation of the UNLD and the final evaluation report of the UNLD will be submitted in the United Nations General Assembly in 2013.

To demonstrate the multiple utilization's of Literacy the decade was split up in 5 major themes:

- 2003-2004 Literacy and Gender
- 2005-2006 Literacy and Sustainable Development
- 2007-2008 Literacy and Health
- 2009-2010 Literacy and Empowerment
- 2011-2012 Literacy and Peace.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
1945 , 16 November	UNESCO was founded in London.
1971	UNDP was founded.
1982, 6 August	In Mexico City the World Conference on the topic of Cultural Politics , the "Mexico City Declaration", was adopted and the standards for the promotion of culture and the cultural development were set.
1991, 19 December	A/RES/45/158 was adopted by the GA and the

	“World Commission on Culture and Development” was founded.
1996, 16 December	A/RES/51/179 Resolution asked the UNESCO to donate more attention to the important relations between development and culture.
1998, 26 February	A/RES/52/197 Resolution on Cultural Development passed.
2000, 9 September	The MDGs (Millennium Develop Goals) were set in New York. The 8th and last Millennium Goal stated : “developing a global partnership for development”.
2003	The United Nations Literacy Decade was launched at the United Nations Headquarters.
2003, 20 September	The A/RES/57/249 that declared the 21st of May as the International World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development was adopted in the General Assembly .

Previous Attempts to Resolve the topic

UNESCO`s and UN Actions

There have not been any radical attempts to resolve the issue of preserving cultural identity through promoting literacy. Nevertheless there have been many important actions taken in means of promoting literacy by the United Nations, and especially by the UNESCO. That has shown that it is vital that MEDCs and NGOs help –like UNESCO- developing countries with an unstable education system. Furthermore that issue has been on the GA Agenda several times and the UN General Assembly has adopted various Resolutions on Literacy and Cultural Identity throughout the last view decades that have amplified the promotion of literacy and thus the preservation of cultural identity. The UNESCO`s effort and public awareness campaigns can be viewed in several countries, the agency has invested a lot of money and time into the promotion of literacy and the preservation of cultural identity and that has been recognized worldwide.

Possible Solutions

To uphold the promotion of Literacy as a mean of preserving cultural Identity can be further pursued by encouraging the UNESCO and their efforts, due to which throughout the last years public awareness on the topic has been raised and nowadays there is an increased rate of interest in the modern societies.

Another possible solution is the creation of a new sub-committee of the UNESCO which would gather information on statistics and rates from all over the globe and then send them back to UNESCO in forms of reports. Moreover this new committee will help raising awareness in several countries specifically on the issue of Promoting Literacy as a mean of Preserving culture identity. That could be achieved through advertisements and media awareness in European and American states. To achieve maximum effectiveness of the new founded subcommittee United Nations Member Countries should start sharing their advice and knowledge on the topic with each other and the new subcommittee so that there can be a new and common view on the issue between Member States and UNESCO.

Also an advanced solution could be to make public to LEDCs how profitable literacy can be. Literacy can help lowering poverty rates and is a good empowering tool for humans of any age, as it can help people to be able to anticipate new and simple job positions -especially in LEDCs. Countries must understand the important cohesion between literacy and the preservation of cultures. If literacy is spread in a country, culture can be strengthened by literal texts of history and many traditions can be written down and be passed on to the upcoming generations in form of a written text.

Last it is also very important for countries with low educational programmes to have a massive modification to their educational programmes and generally, school curricula in every country should be completed with the education of at least two foreign languages as a mandatory subject.

Bibliography

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/culture>

http://www.reformed.org/webfiles/antithesis/index.html?mainframe=/webfiles/antithesis/v1n5/ant_v1n5_illiteracy.html

http://www.unesco.org/education/GMR2006/full/chapt1_eng.pdf

<http://priven.org/the-importance-of-cultural-identity-to-empower-people-the-example-of-barlovento-by-didi-ananda-sadhana/>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/human-rights-basics>

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/glossary/#h>

http://www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/Fact_Sheet_2010_Lit_EN.pdf