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INTERLINKAGES, MULTILINGUALISM AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Multilingualism, a core value of the United Nations, is an often overlooked but critical thread that links all of the SDGs. Indeed, it is a fundamental principle of humanity that all experience is mediated through language, including developing innovative solutions to the challenges highlighted by the SDGs in review at HLPF 2024. In its report *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning*, the World Bank notes a link between language and poverty, writing that “human capital accumulation is largely a language-based endeavor”. Indigenous people continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty. Linguistic discrimination, particularly of indigenous peoples and minorities, prevents the building of linguistic capacity needed to overcome conditions of poverty when those facing discrimination cannot access education and employment opportunities available only or primarily through dominant national or regional languages. In this way, **SDG 1** and **SDG 16** are closely connected because promoting inclusive societies to ensure that no one is left behind when it comes to social and economic opportunities must include safeguarding the language rights guaranteed in human rights instruments such as the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

Furthermore, reflecting on this relationship offers an opportunity to consider how the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2033) can be leveraged to make progress on language rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in ways that will strengthen linguistic capacity building to reduce poverty among indigenous communities and ensure that institutions at all levels are fully inclusive of indigenous peoples.

The dominance of a small number of national and regional languages in countries across the world continues to be a significant challenge to inclusion. Fostering multilingual inclusion requires “multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources” and “effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships” as called for in **SDG 17**. As the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs presents in its *Stakeholder Engagement and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide*, bringing the full scope of human innovation and problem-solving to put the SDGs back on track can only be accomplished if all voices can be heard and understood by making information multilingually accessible, reducing linguistic barriers to participation, raising awareness about the SDGs in local languages, and generally engaging everyone everywhere in their own languages. Civil society organizations are vital partners in harnessing a broad spectrum of linguistically and culturally diverse perspectives and knowledge foundations to put the SDGs back on track towards “effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.”

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