



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT

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FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING

Nuku'alofa, Tonga

24-26 March 2009

SESSION SEVEN

OUR PACIFIC HERITAGE

This paper was prepared by the UNESCO Office for Pacific States for the information of Ministers.



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OUR PACIFIC HERITAGE – A CONCEPT NOTE¹

Purpose

'Our Pacific Heritage' is an initiative by the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States to bring to the attention of Ministers some of the important features of our heritage in the Pacific. It also proposes a way forward in trying to preserve and at the same time promote and transmit these aspects to our future generations.

Background

2. The heritage of any society includes those aspects; cultural (including both tangible and intangible), natural (non man-made including biodiversity) as well as social values, traditions, customs, practices, artistic expressions, languages and other aspects of human activity that a society considers important to be preserved and that needs to be passed on so that future generations can learn about their past, make sense of their present and ensure that future generations can also enjoy the same privilege. In the past the transmission of these aspects from one generation to another has mainly been done verbally. However with globalization and the rapidly changing structure in the fabric and values of our society due to the technology revolution and other western developments, the once customary practice of passing on these valuable aspects of society is rapidly disappearing, resulting in much of our heritage either disappearing, becoming irrelevant or being given little attention. The focus in many of our countries on political, economic and environmental development has relegated the focus on our heritage to the background with only lip-service given to the promotion of our heritage and values. This is the dilemma facing the heritage in many of our countries today.

3. Throughout the Pacific, there are many aspects of our history, our culture and our way of life that have been passed on to us by our ancestors. These define who we are and where we come from and provide an opportunity for us to decide which are important to pass on to our children. It is therefore our responsibility and obligation to ensure that our children will have the same privilege of deciding for themselves what aspects of their heritage they need to preserve and pass on to their children.

¹ This paper was prepared by the UNESCO Office for Pacific States

‘Our Pacific Heritage’ flagship initiative

4. The Pacific is recognized throughout the world for the diversity and uniqueness of its heritage with a close interface between culture, biodiversity and the way of life of its people. But despite this, many of our countries are facing huge challenges concerning the survival, relevance, and advancement of our heritage. It is in this context that the UNESCO Office for the Pacific has proposed “Our Pacific Heritage” as a flagship to help in bringing these issues to the attention of leaders of their countries with the hope that it could become a talking point in informal discussions, and ultimately become integrated into the content of what every child learns in school.

5. UNESCO therefore looks towards education as the vehicle for safeguarding and transmitting the important aspects of our heritage to our future generations. The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koichiro Matsuura has put forward a challenge when he said that “the future of our heritage will depend largely on the decisions and actions of all of us and more importantly the present generation of young people, who will become leaders and decision makers of tomorrow. To achieve this vision, countries are challenged to reorient their education systems, policies and practices in order to empower everyone, young and old, to make decisions and act responsibly and in culturally appropriate ways to ensure a bright future for the Pacific people”.

6. Our Pacific Heritage flagship therefore endeavours to establish close linkages with education especially through “The Pacific Education for Sustainable Development Framework”. It also tries to bring to the forefront contemporary challenges currently facing the Pacific such as those created by climate change, the energy and financial crises, including how the wealth of indigenous and traditional knowledge and values prevailing in many of our societies could play a role in addressing these challenges.

7. As part of its strategy for implementing “Our Pacific Heritage” the UNESCO office for the Pacific has developed several kits (OPH Resource KIT) bringing together important aspects of the various sectors and targeting the aspirations of the Pacific ESD framework of “*..empowering Pacific peoples through all forms of locally relevant and culturally appropriate education and learning to make decisions and take actions to meet current and future social, cultural, environmental and economic needs and aspirations.* The OPH Resource Kit synthesises the content relevant to each aspect into a form where it can easily be incorporated into countries’ curriculum in areas where there is strong synergy thus adding to the value and relevance of the curriculum.

8. The presentation related to this paper intends to show Ministers some of the aspects of their heritage that UNESCO has been working on with countries in an effort to safeguard natural and cultural sites, traditional practices and performance, etc. and it demonstrates how education under the ESD framework and through our OPH KIT can help in preserving and transmitting these to future generation.

9. As a first step, UNESCO intends to work closely with interested countries in identifying, through mapping of the curriculum, where important aspects of each country’s heritage could be incorporated if not already present. Once completed, information can then be used by countries with support from UNESCO as well as other partners, and using the OPH KIT to integrate these aspects into the curriculum. UNESCO looks forward to working closely with countries as well as partners on this initiative in an effort to enhance and safeguard countries’ heritage and to ensure that these are transmitted through education as well as other means.

FORUM EYES ONLY

10. In the long run, UNESCO looks forward to working with interested countries in developing KIT(S) in areas targeting important aspects of their heritage. Some of the areas that have recently become prominent include climate change, food security, energy crisis, water management and food security. Pacific society responses using indigenous and traditional knowledge could help to find solutions but we need to ensure that such knowledge is packaged in a way that societies can share them and how they can be used to respond to these global challenges.

Recommendations

11. Ministers are invited to:

- (a) **note** the paper on ‘Our Pacific Heritage’;
- (b) **endorse** the work of UNESCO; and
- (c) **urge** other development partners to work together in encouraging preservation and transmission of their heritage.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva

3 March 2009