

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

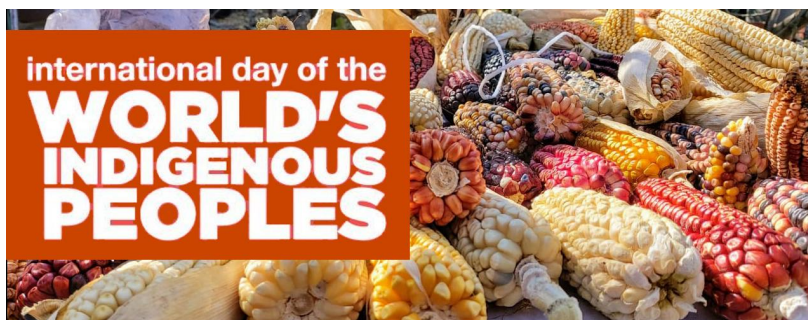
Source: <https://www.news18.com/news/lifestyle/international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples-2021->

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. They make up less than 5 per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures.

HISTORY

August 9 marks the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. It is observed each year around the world to protect the rights of the indigenous population. This event acknowledges the achievements and contributions of the indigenous peoples. The commemoration takes place in recognition of the inaugural session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the United Nations in 1982, in Geneva. It was the first meeting where the UN body was tasked with drafting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In April 2000, The Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution to set up the Permanent UN Forum on Indigenous issues that was presented by the Economic and Social Council. The forum focused and discussed the issues related to education, culture, economic and social development, environment, health, human rights, among other areas. The goal was mainly to strengthen international cooperation for solving problems faced by the global indigenous population.



SIGNIFICANCE

Each year, UNESCO marks this day by sharing updates on projects and activities relevant to the annual theme. UNESCO addresses the multiple challenges indigenous peoples face, acknowledges their role in sustaining the world's cultural and biological diversity and seeks support.

With 370-500 million indigenous peoples representing the majority of the world's cultural diversity, they speak the greater share of almost 7000 languages in the world. To date, numerous indigenous peoples experience extreme poverty, marginalization, and other human rights violations.

THEME

The 2021 commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples will aim on the theme "Leaving no one behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract." The event will feature an interactive session with two speakers. The discussion will focus on the distinct elements which should be considered while building and redesigning a fresh social contract inclusive of indigenous peoples.

This will specifically actualise indigenous peoples' own forms of governance and lifestyle which must be respected and established on their genuine inclusive participation and partnership and free, prior, and informed consent.



August 2021 Calendar

National Breastfeeding Month

National Immunization Awareness Month

- 1 – World Lung Cancer Day
- 1 – Lughnassad – Imbolc (Wicca/Neo Pagan)
- 1-7 – World Breastfeeding Week
- 6 – Hiroshima Day
- 3 – Krishna Janmashtami (Hindu)
- 9 – International Day of World's Indigenous People
- 10 – Hijra (Islam)
- 13 – International Lefthanders' Day
- 15 – Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic)
- 17-18 – Shavuot (Jewish)
- 26 – Women's Equality Day (International)

How Technology Helps Preserve Endangered Indigenous Languages

Source: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2020/04/15/technology-indigenous-languages>

Of the 574 federally recognized Native American tribes, only 139 of them still have speakers of their native language, and more than 90% of those languages are at risk of becoming extinct by 2050. Languages carry tribal knowledge, culture, humor, conversation styles, spirituality, and traditions. When language speakers decrease dramatically and parts of the language is lost, it must be “refashioned” into the new language using different words, sounds, and grammatical structures—if the transfer is even possible at all.

“Linguists’ work in communities when language shift is occurring shows that for the most part such refashioning, even when social identity is maintained, involves abrupt loss of tradition,” University of Texas professor of linguistics Anthony Woodbury writes. “More often, the cultural forms of the colonial power take over, transmitted often by television.”

Language revitalization is grounded in education and accessibility; if language resources aren’t available and there are no designated ways to practice that language, how will it continue to be used? Some tribes, such as the Cherokee Nation and Navajo Nation, have held language courses for several years, but many tribes face barriers to developing language programs of their own. There may not be any remaining elders who speak the language well enough to teach it—the Cherokee and Navajo Nations are the two largest Native American tribes who have retained the most speakers of their languages.

Then even if there is an elder available to teach, they may lack resources to set up structured, systemic language classes. Then, there is the added challenge of accessibility—if the classes take place at a high school on the reservation, how will tribe members living off the reservation access the information? That’s where technological solutions can help.

The Computers In Our Pockets

When Keegan Livermore, a member of the Yakama Nation, learned that there were only a couple dozen fluent speakers of Ichishkiin—a language in the Sahaptin family spoken by the Yakama, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation—he felt a responsibility to learn the language himself.

While attending a technology panel during a linguistic education workshop, Livermore’s group discussed how language tools could be made more accessible to young people. “We’ve already had computer keyboards,” Livermore said. “If we’re thinking about how to get teenagers and college students to use it, why not make a phone keyboard?”

Livermore, who at the time was studying linguistics and learning the Ichishkiin language at Heritage University on the Yamaka Reservation, describes the process of creating an Android Ichishkiin keyboard as a four-day fever dream, working on his graduate studies during the day and coding the keyboard at night.

Written Ichishkiin has a 39-character alphabet, many of which are modified English characters. But, the intention was to have a keyboard strictly built for Ichishkiin, not a keyboard based in English. For example, the alphabet has the characters k, w, and kw. While Livermore could have created a modified English keyboard that just had k and w, he chose to create a key for kw, honoring the actual alphabet of the language.

Livermore and seven other Ichishkiin speakers then tested the keyboard in text messages and social media posts, modifying the placement of characters until the keyboard seemed optimized for Ichishkiin. “I was really pushing myself to use it as often as I could,” Livermore said, which helped him build his confidence speaking the language. “It gives me a tether for the language.”

Livermore, who is now working on adapting the keyboard to iOS, envisions using phone keyboards as a way to assign homework in his own future language curriculum. An easy assignment could be a student texting him a couple sentences in Ichishkiin about what they did over the weekend or requiring a few texts a week between class “pen pals,” Livermore said. Those types of assignments inject the language in students’ everyday modern life—a key part of language revitalization.

Because Ichishkiin speakers must have a grasp of vocabulary to read and type the language, Livermore’s keyboard isn’t an early education tool, but rather an accessible way to integrate practice into a learner’s daily life. “It enables you to use what you already know,” Livermore said.

Preservation Through Audio

According to Hohn, Lushootseed no longer has first-language speakers—people who grew up speaking fluently—so linguists only had access to the language through preserved writings and audio recordings. Recording and archiving audio files of elders or fluent speakers is another preservation tool that can provide a foundation to language revitalization.

FirstVoices is a suite of web-based tools designed to help Indigenous people archive language information for teaching and preservation. The service, launched in 2003, provides tribes with a page where audio clips of words, phrases, stories, songs, and more can be uploaded and organized. The initiative, run by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council in British Columbia, also provides grants for communities working on language revitalization to compensate them for the time it takes to archive the audio.

Daniel Yona, FirstVoices’ development manager, stressed that the service enables tribes to approach language documentation and revitalization as each community sees best fit by providing as many tools as possible for each tribe to customize their archive. For example, each tribe’s archive has an administrator who can determine which recordings are private and which are public. Public recordings can be played by anyone, but to listen to private recordings, a tribal member must create an account and be approved by the tribe’s administrator to access the audio. This keeps recordings of prayers or sacred songs strictly within the tribal community.

How Technology Helps Preserve Endangered Indigenous Languages - *continued*

Source: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2020/04/15/technology-indigenous-languages>

FirstVoices now hosts 31 of the 34 indigenous languages in B.C., as well as some Native American languages from the United States. Yona says that it's not a goal to have all of the languages archived on FirstVoices, because the initiative is only one part of the multifaceted effort of language revitalization. "Just because they're not on FirstVoices doesn't mean they don't have dictionaries and they're not doing work in their own communities," Yona said. "Technology is one piece of this bigger picture of language revitalization."

The Treat of a Long Process

With the threat of language extinction looming, native language activists such as Hohn and Livermore feel a sense of urgency in everything they do. At the same time, language revitalization is a generational process.

"I will never see in my lifetime the state of language that I aspire to," Livermore said. The Ichishkiin learners Livermore will teach will become better teachers than he is, and their students will pass on the skills to their descendants. Livermore foresees a language revival among future generations, but that doesn't stop the pressure of needing to do as much as he can right now.

"I feel that sense of urgency all the time," Hohn said, but being patient in the face of a constant threat of language extinction is essential to successful revitalization. A limited number of Lushootseed teachers deeply understand the language. If teachers who do not understand the language in a cultural and historical way are pushed to teach as many people as they can in the name of revitalization, the language will still be reduced to grammar and vocabulary. That childlike understanding of Lushootseed, or any other native language, will be detrimental to the integrity and significance of the language, Hohn said.

"You have to have language with meaning or what's the point?" Hohn said.



New Staff Profile: Maritza Castellanos



Maritza Castellanos is the newest interpreter in the Spanish-language team at MIS. She was born in San Francisco and moved to Ecuador with her family at a young age. She lived in Ecuador for ten years, then moved back to California. Maritza and her older sister were their mother's interpreters until she learned English. Maritza attended the Academy of Art University in San Francisco where she majored in Art. She started her own family and raised four children. She also continued her studies, and became a Medical Assistant. This job allowed Maritza to use her bilingual skills in a medical setting.

After relocating to Sacramento with her family, Maritza went through a professional medical interpreter training. Her Medical Assistant experience came in handy. "This is the profession I love," – says Maritza. "I feel that I am contributing to my community, as well as to the community of medical professionals. I am grateful for the amazing team at UCDH that helped orient me to the department and continues to support me in the work that I do."

In her spare time, Maritza taught her grandkids to paint on canvas, walks at McKinley Park, and enjoys music and art. Welcome aboard to UCDH, Maritza!