Langscape

Unity in Biocultural Diversity

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What is to be ‘sustained’ in this rapidly changing world? The answer is simply yet profoundly ‘life itself’—life in its richness, diversity, vitality, and resilience in both nature and culture.

David Rapport, 2008
Dear Members and Friends of Terralingua,

Another year is almost over, and here at Terralingua we have been working as hard as ever. It was a very productive year, as you will see from the reports in this issue. It was also a challenging year, as we, like everybody else, were significantly affected by the global economic downturn. Although we received one grant for our new biocultural diversity education work, three other grants for the continuation of our work on biocultural indicators, biocultural diversity mapping, and with the Rarámuri people in northern Mexico were declined. We strategically tightened our belts while continuing to seek to fundraise, and persevered with our activities, striving to make the most of the outcomes of our past and current work to advance the cause of biocultural diversity in research, education, policy and on-the-ground work, according to our mission.

The end of the year is a good time for a look back at what we have accomplished. For over a decade now, Terralingua has been working toward changing the global mindset of policy and conservation efforts toward the recognition that there is an inextricable link between biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and that to conserve one of these aspects of the diversity of life requires conserving the others. The figure on this page visualizes this link between diversities at the global level, and between biodiversity and cultures at the local level.

Our team has produced key scientific research to show: a) that this link exists; b) that species and languages are depleting at equally rapid rates; and c) that integrated conservation efforts focusing both on protecting biodiversity and supporting local cultures and languages have a better chance to succeed in sustaining the diversity of all life. We have accomplished this through various means:

- **Our publications**, such as the pioneering book *On Biocultural Diversity* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) and the authoritative review of biocultural diversity “Linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity” (Annual Review of Anthropology 34, 2005), which have helped lay the theoretical foundations of biocultural diversity. As you will see on p. 17, we continue to produce a steady stream of publications that contribute to refine and deepen the framework of biocultural diversity.

- **Our work on mapping biocultural diversity**, which has spearheaded the study of the geography of biocultural diversity and of the factors that affect the permanence or loss of diversity in nature and culture. This has led to the development of a wide variety of global and regional maps, which we now hope to house on an interactive mapping portal on biocultural diversity (see project update on p. 15).
Our research on biocultural diversity indicators—that is, quantitative tools that can inform researchers, policy makers, and the public about the state and trends of diversity in nature and culture. Our Index of Biocultural Diversity (found at www.terralingua.org/projects/ibcd/ibcd.html) was the first result. Our feature article in this issue (p. 5) is devoted to our most recent work on indicators.

Our survey of 45 projects around the world that take an integrated biocultural approach to conservation of biodiversity and affirmation of local cultures and languages, and that offer key lessons on what works, how, and why in biocultural diversity conservation. Our review and analysis of these projects is being published in the volume Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook (Earthscan, 2010; see project update on p. 11).

Our own on-the-ground work with the Rarámuri people of the Sierra Tarahumara of northern Mexico, through which we seek to assist their efforts to recover the eco-cultural health of their landscape and their communities, by means of ecological restoration and of educational curriculum focused on their own language and cultural traditions. We report on the latest on p.13.

Our education and policy work, through the development of educational tools for schools and the general public (see p. 14 for an update) and involvement in international venues and processes, through which we are contributing to raising awareness and advancing the cause of biocultural diversity (see p. 16 and 17 for our most recent engagements).

All together, several aspects of our work form an interrelated set of tools that arise from within the theoretical framework of biocultural diversity, and allow us to expand and deepen our understanding of the nature of biocultural diversity, pinpoint its status and trends, and identify better ways for sustaining it through policy and on-the-ground work. The figure on this page illustrates how these pieces converge into what we are beginning to think of as a “Biocultural Diversity Toolkit”.

Combined with our biocultural diversity education and policy work, the Biocultural Diversity Toolkit will serve to give ever-greater visibility to the biocultural approach. With your support, we can make it happen! You, the members, are the backbone of Terralingua. In these difficult economic times, we can’t necessarily count on the support of charitable foundations, but we do count on you! This winter, we plan to raise $25,000 in support of our projects. Your donations will help us refine and promote the application of our ideas and tools, and foster our ongoing effort to sustain the diversity of life in nature and culture for generations to come. Please donate as generously as you can! Thank you!

With warmest wishes for the holidays,

Luisa Maffi
Over the past three years, we have expanded our work on biocultural indicators, which had previously resulted in the development of our Index of Biocultural Diversity (IBCD—see www.terralingua.org/projects/ibcd/ibcd.html). The IBCD—the brainchild of our long-time collaborators Dave Harmon and Jonathan Loh—combined a set of indicators of global cultural diversity (diversity of languages, ethnicities and religions), with a set of indicators of biodiversity. It provided a quantitative assessment of the state of biocultural diversity, both globally and on a country-to-country level. One of the IBCD’s main findings was the identification of three “core areas” of high biocultural diversity: the Amazon Basin, Central Africa, and Indo-Malaysia/Melanesia. The map on this page shows these core areas as identified by the IBCD.

These were important findings, which independently confirmed the close geographic correlation between areas of high biodiversity and high cultural diversity that we had shown through our earlier biocultural diversity mapping work (see our update on mapping on p.15). At the same time, the IBCD only provided a “snapshot” of the state of biocultural diversity at a given point in time. By itself, it could not answer the crucial question about trends in biocultural diversity, that is: Is biocultural diversity indeed being lost, as qualitative data suggest, and if so, at which rate? Further, the IBCD did not capture some crucial aspects of cultural diversity that are closely associated with both languages and biodiversity, such as traditional environmental knowledge.

In our more recent work, therefore, we wanted to pursue two additional goals:

- To provide trend data, showing changes over time in cultural indicators, so as to match existing indicators of changes in biodiversity; and
- To expand our roster of cultural indicators.

With the support of The Christensen Fund, we developed the Index of Linguistic Diversity (ILD)—again the work of Dave Harmon and Jonathan Loh—and the Vitality Index of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (VITEK), conceived by our collaborator Dr. Stanford Zent. These tools allow for the assessment and monitoring of state and trends of two key aspects of cultural diversity:

- The vitality of the world’s languages, as measured in terms of changes in the numbers of mother-tongue speakers of each language; and
- The vitality of traditional environmental knowledge (TEK), as measured in terms of the intergenerational transmission of TEK.
Both the ILD and the VITEK are world firsts. Never before had there been a quantitative tool for assessing and monitoring the health of language diversity around the world, which is what the ILD does. We are no longer confined to anecdotal qualitative evidence or educated guesses. We can actually know in a verifiable way what is really happening. Initial results show that global linguistic diversity (of which about 80% is represented by indigenous languages) has declined by 20% between 1970 and 2005; and that the trends in linguistic diversity follow closely those in biodiversity, which lends support to the idea of the links between diversity in nature and culture. You can read more about it at www.terralingua.org/projects/ILD/ild.htm. The full report will be posted on our website early in the new year.

Likewise, the VITEK is the world’s first quantitative tool for understanding how traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) changes over time, and for keeping track of the intergenerational transmission of TEK. In other words, with the VITEK we now have a way for systematically assessing and monitoring the persistence or loss of TEK in any given locale. Furthermore, the VITEK methodology is both locally sensitive and globally applicable, giving us the making of a new global cultural indicator. The full VITEK report is at www.terralingua.org/projects/vitek/vitek.htm. Stanford Zent is now piloting this tool on the ground in indigenous and local communities in Venezuela.

In the following pages, we introduce these new tools through interviews that Langscape editor Ortixia Dilts conducted with the Terralingua colleagues who were responsible for their development.

**Index of Linguistic Diversity**

*The Index of Linguistic Diversity (ILD) – an interview with Dave Harmon, ILD co-developer*

**Q: Can you explain in simple terms for Terralingua’s public what the ILD is meant to do?**

**A:** The ILD is based on a random sample of 1,500 of the 7,299 languages listed in the 15th edition of Ethnologue (2005), the standard compendium of the world’s languages. Trends were derived by analyzing data on changes in the number of mother-tongue speakers from nine editions of Ethnologue dating back to 1951.

The ILD measures how far, on average, the languages of the world deviate from a hypothetical situation in which each language is neither increasing nor decreasing its share of the total world population. The ILD benchmark is the relative proportion of the world’s population each language held in 1970, the earliest year we could set the index given the data available. If somehow each language could have maintained that proportion throughout the period, the ILD trendline for 1970–2005 would be perfectly flat. Of course such stability is impossible, and so the ILD measures the average amount of deviation from that trendline: a rising trendline indicates an increase in linguistic diversity, while a falling trendline indicates a decrease.

**Q: What is the significance of the ILD? What is unique about it?**

**A:** The ILD is, as far as we know, the first and only global quantitative index of linguistic diversity.
Q: Why was it needed?

A: There is a great deal of qualitative evidence for declining linguistic diversity. There is very little good quantitative evidence: we have numerous reports of individual language extinctions, and educated guesses about the rate of extinctions. The ILD begins to fill this gap.

Q: What do we learn from it?

A: One important lesson of the ILD is that calculating extinction rates is neither the only nor even the best measure of declining linguistic diversity. A lot of linguistic diversity is lost long before the last mother-tongue speaker of a language dies. The ILD provides a measure of this pre-extinction decline in linguistic diversity.

Q: How should this knowledge influence researchers, practitioners, activists, policy makers, and the general public?

A: It is important to understand the best use of global indices. A common misunderstanding and misuse of global indices is to consider them as guideposts for what should be done in a particular situation on the ground. Global indices, however, are not policy prescriptions. They are designed and intended to be broad orienting tools, a means to galvanize policymakers and activists into action. Nor do they do anything more than represent the broad outlines of complex phenomena. They must always be supplemented by finer-grained analyses tuned to a local situation. We hope that the ILD will stimulate such locally-attuned analyses that can better inform specific policy action.

Q: Could you please tell me about your original “shadow” database of Ethnologue? I am also curious what brought you from the philosophical study of diversity (as in your 2002 book In Light of Our Differences) to the statistical study of language diversity.

A: I created the shadow database beginning in 1992, after I presented a paper on the relationship between biological and cultural diversity at the World Parks Congress in Venezuela. I had realized there was a geographical overlap and I wanted to really ground myself in a knowledge of the distribution of the world’s languages. I have always been interested in cross-disciplinary scholarship, dating back to my undergrad days.

The Vitality Index of Traditional Environmental Knowledge (VITEK): An interview with VITEK developer, Dr. Stanford Zent.

Q: Can you explain in simple terms for Terralingua’s readers what the VITEK is meant to do?

A. The VITEK consists of a set of field methods and computational procedures which are intended to assess in quantitative terms the vitality of traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) in any specified community or population. Vitality is defined here as the rate of retention of knowledge across generations. The inverse of the retention value is effectively the amount and speed of change. Thus the VITEK can tell you how much of the knowledge base is or is not being transmitted from one generation to the next.

The VITEK assessment essentially involves measuring the differences of knowledge and practices between people of different generations. The assessment process entails two basic steps: 1) compile a register or inventory of data items for
a range of different environmental knowledge domains, based on the judgment of locally recognized experts (for example, plants known and used, biotopes named or recognized, farming techniques, craft types and styles, etc.); and 2) construct a TEK aptitude test, based on the register of data items, and administer the test to a sample of individuals in at least three generations (father/mother, son/daughter, and grandson/granddaughter).

The results of the test can be used to calculate the vitality measure, which consists of three integrated statistics: a) intergenerational rate of retention, b) cumulative rate of retention, and c) annual rate of change. These measures can then be used to compare the status and trends of TEK across communities, regions, countries, etc., depending on where the method is applied and comparable results obtained. This is a thumbnail sketch of how and what it is meant to do. There is of course a little more to it and I would direct the interested reader to TL’s web page for more details (see www.terralingua.org/projects/vitek.ch1.htm).

Q. **What is the significance of the VITEK?**

A. One of the ultimate goals of the VITEK is to gain wide application and use, in some form or another, in different communities, countries and regions. So success must be measured ultimately in terms of its popularity. At this point, it is still in an experimental phase. A method for collecting the data and calculating the rate of intergenerational retention has been put onto paper, and we are currently in the process of carrying out a pilot study to see if the method is efficient and practical enough for mass consumption or if it needs to be revised.

The pilot study is being done so far in three radically different communities in Venezuela. One is a Caribbean coastal town of fisherfolk-farmers who are of Afro-European descent. Another consists of dispersed hamlets in the Andean paramo (high mountain) ecosystem inhabited by mestizo (European-Indian) agriculturalists-pastoralists. The last one is a Piaroa Indian community displaying a horticultural-hunting-gathering economic orientation and occupying a savanna-forest ecotone environment. We are planning to add another Indian community to the pilot study at some point, tentatively a Jotï Indian group who live in a more remote, interfluvial tropical forest setting, but so far we have been unable to begin working there. In all three communities where the pilot study is underway, we have yet to begin the testing phase and therefore have no quantitative results to report at this time. It is still an experiment in progress, and therefore it is too soon to discuss its significance in a more specific way.

Q. **What is unique about the VITEK?**

A. In the last few years, stimulated mainly by the Convention on Biological Diversity (BD)’s mandate to develop a series of global indicators for assessing progress towards the reduction of biodiversity loss, there have been a fair number of attempts to identify and define cultural indicators of traditional knowledge, practices and innovations that may be relevant for biodiversity conservation. However, most of these attempts suffer from conceptual or methodological deficiencies. Further, they are focused indirectly on phenomena thought to be closely associated with or relevant to traditional knowledge (for example, land use patterns or traditional occupations)--that is, they focus on proxies rather than target variables.

The main difference between the VITEK and these other indicators is that the VITEK attempts to measure directly the status and trends of TEK itself. Another big difference is that the VITEK offers a bottom-up approach to indicator development. It starts with primary data collection and trend measurement at the local level and then works outward to inter-site or cross-cultural comparison. This means that the results should be most meaningful to the local groups themselves. The key design features are: quantitative measurement of (inferred) trends, comparison of results across different sites and situations, and ability to aggregate results at different spatial scales.
Q. Why was the VITEK needed?

A. It is widely believed that TEK and associated practices and innovations make vital contributions to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. At the same, numerous scientific and nonscientific observers have reported that it is eroding or changing drastically in the modern world we live in. Picking up on these concerns, many conservation organizations and processes around the world, including the CBD and the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, have officially recognized the importance of TEK as a vital component of environmental policy. For this reason, the CBD’s strategic plan designated traditional knowledge, innovations and practices as a focal area for indicator development. Until now, however, the only headline indicator for this focal area has been trends in linguistic diversity and number of speakers of indigenous languages. There is no question about the importance of local language for TEK; nevertheless, language remains an indirect indicator of TEK. Thus, the VITEK was developed as a response to the lack of easy-to-read indicators that directly measure the state and trends of TEK itself. If we are able to come up with a reliable measure of TEK retention/change that is comparable across time and space, then we are in a better position to assess how TEK is in fact related to biodiversity loss or preservation. If applied on a periodic basis, for example before and after a policy initiative, it could also yield information relevant to evaluating policy effectiveness. So there are several potential applications and needs it addresses.

Q. What do we learn from the VITEK?

A. The VITEK assessment can help provide answers to the following questions:
   (a) Is TEK really being eroded, retained or increased?
   (b) How fast is loss/change occurring?
   (c) What areas or groups are most affected?
   (d) What domains of knowledge are most vulnerable?
   (e) What are the causal or conditioning factors?

Q. How should this knowledge influence researchers, practitioners, activists, policy makers, and the general public?

A. First and foremost, the VITEK is intended for use by local communities and organizations, for example to assess the healthy/unhealthy state of their cultural heritage and decide if any pro-active measures need to be taken. Many local groups and individuals are of course aware that cultural loss is taking place but are not motivated to do anything about it until confronted with explicit evidence. Hopefully the VITEK can help bring this out. We also believe it can enhance local groups’ ability to communicate their cultural concerns and needs to outside actors, for example, to marshal support for local knowledge documentation or special educational programs.

Second, it can enable program managers or aid providers to identify critical situations where TEK is endangered and therefore target interventions where they are most needed. For policymakers, it can provide a tool for monitoring trends in traditional knowledge retention or erosion over time, and also serve as a yardstick for evaluating policy performance. Thirdly, for researchers, it is a convenient statistic that can be used to explore the causal or interactive relationships among TEK, biodiversity and local language preservation. For example, analysis of the covariation of TEK vitality and other dynamic ecological indicators (for example, forest cover changes) permits the testing of hypotheses about the relationships between TEK and biodiversity conservation. In a similar vein, it could be combined with measures of linguistic vitality to test the relationship between language shift and TEK erosion or change. We have also seen that quantitative measures of TEK persistence/change are useful for exploring the causes or consequences of knowledge loss or persistence. The basic method of comparing knowledge and practices of members belonging to different generations could be adapted and applied to the study of any cultural domain and in that sense the method is potentially relevant for any study of cultural change.

Fourthly, the use of indicators as a communication device for shaping public opinion is becoming more and more common in our information-soaked society. A simple statistic showing how stable or unstable TEK is could help to educate the general public about the state and fate of this valuable cultural resource.
Community Mapping Of Indigenous Peoples’ Traditional Lands in Venezuela

Source: Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook, by Luisa Maffi and Ellen Woodley (Earthscan, 2010)

Project contributor: Stanford Zent

In 1999, the national constitution of Venezuela gave explicit recognition to the land rights and cultural rights of the country’s indigenous peoples. Following passage of the new constitution and subsequent demarcation laws, several indigenous groups began taking the initiative to carry out the demarcation of their lands on their own rather than wait for the government to do it for them. The project is a collaboration between researchers at the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC) and two indigenous communities in Venezuela - the Hotï of San José de Kayamá, Caño Iguana, and surrounding regions, and the Eñepa of San José de Kayamá. These two small-scale, culturally unique indigenous groups, whose lifestyles and resource use practices are compatible with environmental conservation, are currently faced with strong pressures for social, techno-economic, and ideological change.

The project supports the indigenous groups in efforts to secure legal ownership and title to the land they occupy in a tropical forest region rich in biodiversity. This goal contributes to conservation of both biological and cultural diversity, as well as the crucial relationships between them, by seeking to obtain exclusive rights to land occupation and use for the Hotï and Eñepa, and by attempting to achieve land and resource security for these two groups. Community members are being trained in community-based mapping and documentation to produce the necessary cartographic, demographic, and cultural-historical documents to support their land claims. Members of local Hotï and Eñepa communities are the principal data collectors and processors and work alongside scientists who serve as advisors, trainers and auditors of the data collection process and provide assistance in data analysis and document preparation. The documents being prepared include maps of current and ancestral territories, community censuses, residential histories, oral histories of human-ecosystem interactions, information about land use patterns and resource management practices, cultural norms and notions about territoriality, property, local and ethnic group membership, environmental ethics, and ecocosmoration and ethnogeographical concepts. The project has also led to greater conscious awareness of the value of traditional knowledge of the environment for the current and future lives of the people. Changes in language are also being documented in order to examine links between language, traditional knowledge and environmental change. The final maps, project reports, and other supporting materials were completed in August 2006 and provided to the appropriate National and Regional Demarcation Commissions. This marks the first step in the formal application for land rights recognition. Future plans for the project include adapting the database, maps, and reports into educational materials for use by the Hotï and Eñepa communities.

Photo ©2010 Stanford Zent
Project Updates

Biocultural Diversity Conservation - A Global Sourcebook

As we announced in the previous newsletter, the volume Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook, co-authored by Luisa Maffi and Ellen Woodley, is in press with Earthscan, a UK publishing house. Things are well on track for publication, which is scheduled for February 2010. We are delighted to see several years of Terralingua work come to fruition with this upcoming book!

The Sourcebook is the very first compilation and analysis of successful biocultural projects that are helping communities around the world preserve and protect their cultural and biological resources. It is a unique compendium of projects from all around the world that take an integrated biocultural approach to sustaining cultures and biodiversity. The 45 projects that we review in this volume exemplify a new focus in conservation, based on the emerging realization that protecting and restoring biodiversity and maintaining and revitalizing cultural diversity and cultural vitality are intimately interrelated. This implies that, to maintain biodiversity, we also need to sustain cultural diversity; conversely, in order to sustain cultural diversity, we need to maintain biodiversity.

As Terralingua members and supporters, you are well aware that these links are especially apparent in indigenous and local communities worldwide, and reflected in traditional cultural beliefs, values, knowledge systems, practices and languages. Now, this book brings awareness of these links to a broader audience of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. A foreword by Gonzalo Oviedo, Senior Social Policy Advisor to IUCN – The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and a co-distribution arrangement between Earthscan and IUCN, will ensure the book’s visibility in biodiversity conservation circles, thus helping advance our goal to promote an integrated approach to conservation.

The Sourcebook shows how biocultural diversity conservation is done in practice, using a diversity of approaches adapted to a variety of contexts. The methodological diversity that is adapted to different contexts is in line with the biocultural diversity of life itself, and confers individual and collective strength to these integrated conservation efforts. The book reviews the theory of biocultural diversity and why it is relevant for conservation; presents and analyzes the projects; draws lessons learned; offers recommendations and proposes next steps for the further development of this approach; and considers the role of biocultural diversity in relation to the future of sustainability (see the table of contents on the next page).

For early birds placing orders for the book prior to publication, Earthscan is offering a 20% discount. We hope that many of you will want to avail yourselves of this advantageous opportunity for acquiring the book. Your purchase will help support Terralingua; as accrued royalties will go to Terralingua, not the authors! To place your order, go to www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=101785.

We also would like to let you know that we’re working on developing the companion portal and discussion forum for the Sourcebook, called “Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Community of Practice”, which will be hosted on our website. This interactive space will serve to promote a vital exchange of ideas and experiences about the practice of biocultural diversity conservation, and to raise the visibility of the biocultural approach. The portal will be launched early next year, to coincide with the publication of the book. We’ll let you know when it’s on, and hope to “see” many of you in that space!

If you wish to donate to support the development of the portal, please go to www.terralingua.org and click on the “Donate now!” button. Earmark your donation for the “Sourcebook project”. Your support will help ensure that we can maintain and expand a lively network of biocultural diversity conservation practitioners.
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Last November 7, Terralingua held a very successful fundraiser event on Salt Spring Island, in support of our project with the indigenous Rarámuri people of northern Mexico, with whom we have worked since 2000.

The Rarámuri have lived for many centuries in their ancestral lands in the Sierra Tarahumara of the State of Chihuahua. Their livelihoods and their way of life are now threatened by logging, mining, ranching, and other development activities that have caused serious environmental degradation in the region and social disruption in their communities. Soil depletion and loss of water resources are putting their food sources at risk, and younger people are leaving their communities in search of other ways to sustain their families. To make things worse, climate change is hitting their region hard. The Elders are worried that all these changes will lead to the loss of Rarámuri culture, language and identity.

A Terralingua team has been working with the Rarámuri to support their efforts to recover the health of their landscape and the well-being of their people. On the Rarámuri’s request, the initial focus of Terralingua’s work was on bringing drinking water to their homes, creating tree nurseries and home gardens, and assessing their health and nutritional status. Now the Rarámuri wish to realize their dream of an alternative education curriculum centered on Rarámuri language and culture. They also are keen to continue to build capacity to restore a thriving agriculture and a healthy landscape in their communities.

A group of Rarámuri is eager to visit Salt Spring Island in 2010, to work with the Terralingua team on the educational curriculum and to learn more about ecosystem health, permaculture, ecoforestry, and other sustainable practices from local farmers and experts. This visit will allow for a mutually enriching intercultural exchange and learning experience with the Salt Spring community. The Rarámuri will also have an opportunity to meet with local teachers and students and explore the possibility of educational exchanges. As well, we plan on arranging for meetings between the Rarámuri and local First Nations. In this connection, we were proud to receive the endorsement of the new National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Canada, Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, who in his letter recognized “the Terralingua project as a meaningful initiative that should be supported and celebrated for the innovation and modernization of education”.

The fundraiser brought together over 200 people of different ages to dance to the lively Cuban rhythms of the Jose Sanchez Cuban Party. A silent auction of items generously donated by Salt Spring businesses and individuals and a menu of traditional Mexican foods completed the evening’s offerings. We are delighted to report that, with the proceeds from this event, we have completed our fundraising effort. We met our goal of raising $15,000, and all of this amount will go to pay for the Rarámuri’s visit, which is planned for the spring of 2010. We’ve started preparations, and will keep you posted!

The main outcome we expect from this visit is a mutually agreed-upon plan for the development of alternative education curriculum and other educational opportunities for the Rarámuri, according to their vision. Then the challenge will be garnering the funds needed to do the work. We are counting on our members and supporters to help us continue our work with the Rarámuri.

Please donate to assist the Rarámuri in maintaining and restoring the health of their landscape and the vitality of their language and cultural traditions! Go to www.terralingua.org to donate, and if you wish, let us know that your donation is earmarked for the “Sierra project”. Thank you!
Biocultural Diversity in Education

In June, we were fortunate to receive a $50,000 grant from The Christensen Fund in support of a new line of work for Terralingua: the development of educational tools to help teachers, students, and the general public understand biocultural diversity and get involved in sustaining it. Although we have done some educational work in the past—particularly the very successful booklet Sharing a World of Difference: The World’s Linguistic, Cultural, and Biological Diversity that we produced for UNESCO—this is the first time that we have an opportunity to think systematically of how to convey the concept and significance of biocultural diversity in an educational context. We are excited about this opportunity to reach a larger audience in different age groups, from school children to adults!

Our primary objective is to work with students and teachers to co-create and implement educational curriculum on biocultural diversity that will be actually used in a classroom setting. The focus is on active, engaged, hands-on learning that will challenge both students and teachers to understand what biocultural diversity is, why it matters, what’s happening with it and why, and what they can do to help preserve and protect it.

We have been talking with educators at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, who are involved in the creation of a new place-based environmental elementary school, and expect to collaborate with them on the development of a biocultural diversity module for this school. We also made contact with the School District that oversees schools here on Salt Spring Island, and have the keen interest of the District Superintendent in a collaboration involving the local high school. This work will also dovetail importantly with the educational work we will be doing with the Rarámuri people on their alternative education curriculum (see our report on p. 13, and we expect to see a lot of fruitful “cross-fertilization” among these activities.

In preparation for this work, we have been gathering useful resources from our previous work and other relevant sources, from which we can draw to explain the concepts and illustrate them with maps, graphs, figures, and real-life examples. In so doing, we are also laying the ground for preparing an entirely new, updated and expanded, version of the Sharing a World of Difference booklet. This new version may serve as a learning tool for high school students, along with an innovative study guide that we plan to develop with students and teachers. The new booklet should also be appropriate for raising awareness about biocultural diversity among the general public.

If all goes well, there may also be media offshoots of these activities, through collaboration with a cutting-edge broadcasting and educasting media project, which has recently begun engaging in programs related to biocultural diversity. Preliminary discussions with this media project suggest the potential for inclusion of Terralingua-produced materials on biocultural diversity in some of these radio programs, which will be widely broadcast in North America and internationally, and in the post-broadcast extension of the radio programs’ life through web-based educasting.

Needless to say, all this will keep us busy for months to come! With current funding, we expect to lay the foundations of this work in the first part of 2010. Beyond that, further fundraising is needed for the full development and implementation of the educational tools that we envision.

We welcome your support for this important effort to “seed” biocultural diversity in a wider audience! To make a secure donation for this project, please go to the “donate now” page on our website, www.terralingua.org, and specify that your contribution is for the “BCD Education project”.

Project Updates

Photo ©2010 Cristina Mittermeier
In collaboration with our colleague and former Board member Rick Stepp of the University of Florida, we are making plans to develop a web-based Biocultural Diversity Mapping Portal, devoted to research on the geography of biocultural diversity and the factors that affect the permanence or loss of diversity in nature and culture.

In 2008, Rick produced a set of 13 stunning maps that show the initial results of his research, and which were exhibited at the symposium “Sustaining Cultural and Biological Diversity in a Rapidly Changing World”, which we co-organized in New York with the American Museum of Natural History and IUCN. This work followed up on the pioneering work done earlier on by Terralingua, which resulted in the maps we produced in collaboration with WWF in 2000 and with UNESCO in 2003 (downloadable from our Publications page at www.terralingua.org/publications/intro.html).

We now wish to make this existing work, as well as future biocultural mapping work, more widely available in an interactive format to all those interested in the geospatial aspects of biocultural diversity: from researchers to conservationists to the general public. In other words, we would like for the portal to serve as an educational, research, and policy tool, to foster understanding and protection of biocultural diversity. We have gathered expressions of interest in this tool from international organizations as well as academics. The portal will also be an outstanding complement to the biocultural diversity education work we are undertaking.

Please donate to help make this project a reality! Go to www.terralingua.org and click on the “Donate now” button, earmarking your donation for “BCD Mapping Portal”. Thank you for your support!

GET INVOLVED!

Whether or not you are a member, we want to hear from you!

Translate our Statement of Purpose into your mother tongue. (see page 20)

Inform us on what is happening with biocultural diversity in your part of the world, and maybe become a regional point person for Terralingua.

Write an information piece or feature article on biocultural diversity, and we will gladly consider it for our newsletter. Contact editor at ortixia@terralingua.org.

Tell us about a project or activity on which you would like to partner with us, and we’ll discuss this possibility with you.

Offer to volunteer your special expertise in support of Terralingua’s work, and we will be happy to take on your offer as circumstances allow.

And more- your creativity and imagination are the limit!

Let us know how you would like to get involved by contacting us at info@terralingua.org.
Biocultural Diversity in Policy:
Resilient People + Climate Change Conference

On October 21-22, Terralingua’s Luisa Maffi and David Rapport participated in the “Resilient People + Climate Change” conference in Vancouver, BC, Canada, one of the many events that took place worldwide in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (December 7-18, 2009). The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the psychological and social impacts of climate change, and what is needed for people to maintain resilience in the face of climatic, social, and economic change.

This event was an opportunity for us to bring to the fore the impacts of climate change for one of the most vulnerable sectors of global society: indigenous peoples and other local communities. Environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht (Murdoch University, Australia) described the psychological distress resulting from the environmental changes brought about by climate change as “solastalgia”—a feeling akin to nostalgia, but related not to the longing for a homeland that one has moved away from, but rather to the longing caused by a loss of sense of place while one is still in place. As we pointed out at the conference, in the case of indigenous and local communities affected by climate change, in addition to individual psychological impacts there are profound collective cultural impacts. As Arctic ice melts and ocean levels rise around low-lying islands and along coastal regions, indigenous and other local populations are experiencing dramatic changes in the landscape that are affecting their ability to continue their traditional ways of life, and even their ability to continue to live on their lands.

Therefore, climate change represents yet another threat to the vitality of global biocultural diversity and to the eco-cultural health of communities worldwide. And certainly the threat of climate change, combined with the current economic recession, is making for a lot of “bad news” reporting in the media. Yet, as we argued, the “bad news of the day” should not obscure that the very bases of life on this planet are being threatened by a lot more than our present economic and climate woes. The ongoing loss of the world’s diversity in nature and culture, due to many forms of ecosystem degradation from unsustainable development and depletion of natural resources from overexploitation, is deeply undermining the health of our eco-cultural systems.

As eco-cultural systems—the complex adaptive systems created by long-term interactions between people and environment—continue to falter and fail the world over, and biocultural diversity dwindles, we should all be reminded that the challenges we face go well beyond “getting the economy going again” and “reducing our carbon footprint”. Our greatest challenges lie in countering the erosion of the diversity of life in nature and culture, and in restoring health to the planet’s eco-cultural systems. The message we sent to Copenhagen was that, until addressing these overarching challenges becomes the order of the day, we will be largely fighting piecemeal battles with limited chances for success.

Your support of Terralingua will help us continue our campaign for putting the preservation and protection of biocultural diversity in the forefront of international policy-making. Please contribute to this effort by donating at www.terralingua.org! If you wish, you can earmark your donation for “BCD Policy”.
Upcoming Events and Publications

Events:

**International Congress of Ethnobiology.** The 12th International Congress of Ethnobiology (ICE), a prime international gathering for those interested in traditional environmental knowledge and human interactions with the environment, will be held in Tofino, British Columbia, Canada on May 9-14, 2010. Terralingua will be present with three sessions organized by us:

- A session on our **Index of Linguistic Diversity (ILD)**, organized by ILD developers Dave Harmon and Jonathan Loh (see feature article on p. 6).
- A session on **biocultural diversity conservation**, organized by Luisa Maffi, in which we’ll present our Sourcebook (see article on p. 11).
- A session on **biocultural diversity mapping**, co-organized by Luisa Maffi and Rick Stepp, which will be devoted to the mapping work carried out by Stepp and colleagues at the University of Florida and to plans for developing a mapping portal (see article on p. 15 above).

In addition, Terralingua is co-organizing the session “Where to, Biocultural Diversity?”, along with the International Society of Ethnobiology and the Global Diversity Foundation. This session will explore the “state of the art” of biocultural diversity and synergies with other germane approaches and like-minded organizations. It will also seek to outline new directions to further advance the understanding and protection of biocultural diversity.

For more information about these sessions, please contact Luisa Maffi at maffi@terralingua.org. The congress website is at www.tbgf.org/ice.

Publications:

Over the past few months, we completed three new articles that will appear in upcoming publications expected out next year, and one previously written article was accepted for publication. These pieces join our ever-growing collection of articles and books that have been putting biocultural diversity on the map in academia and beyond!

The **volume** *Nature and Culture: Revitalizing the connection*, edited by Jules Pretty and Sarah Pilgrim for Earthscan, is one of the outcomes of the 2008 symposium “Sustaining Cultural and Biological Diversity in a Rapidly Changing World”, which we co-organized in New York with the American Museum of Natural History and IUCN. It will contain two chapters based on presentations we made at the symposium:

David Harmon, Ellen Woodley and Jonathan Loh, “Measuring Status and Trends in Biological and Cultural Diversity” (Chapter 4).


In the fall, Luisa Maffi wrote the article “Loss of biocultural diversity” for the four-volume encyclopedia *Il Futuro della Terra [The Future of Earth]*, edited by N. Eldredge and T. Pievani for the Italian publishers UTET.

The multi-authored article “How do Biodiversity and Culture Intersect?” (lead author Jules Pretty, with contributions by Terralingua’s Eugene Hunn, Luisa Maffi, and David Rapport), which was another outcome of the 2008 symposium in New York, has been accepted for publication in the forthcoming *Conservation and Society* 7(2).
Talking Diversity

by Luisa Maffi

Editor’s Note: The BCD Primer is a sections devoted to biocultural diversity basics for those of you who are new to Terralingua and the field of biocultural diversity. Please feel free to send in your questions and/or comments for subsequent issues. (ortixia@terralingua.org). The following is an article slightly modified from the original version first published in January 2008 in World Conservation, the magazine of IUCN – The International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Reproduced with permission.

When they hear the expression “diversity of life”, most people think of biodiversity: diversity in nature, at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels. Since the concept of biodiversity was coined two decades ago, biodiversity and the threats it is facing have become an object of concern not only among conservationists and academics, but also in the wider world of policy, philanthropy, the media and the general public. But in recent years, a newer, more complex and integrated understanding of the notion of diversity of life has been gaining ground—“biocultural” diversity: diversity in culture as well as nature. From this perspective, the diversity of societies, cultures and languages that have developed throughout human history is another expression of life’s evolutionary potential.

Biodiversity and cultural diversity are intimately—some would say inextricably—related to each other. Humans have adapted to life in particular environments, while drawing resources from those environments to sustain themselves. In so doing, they have needed to acquire in-depth knowledge of species, their relationships, and ecosystem functions and to learn how to tailor their practices to suit their ecological niches. To a large extent, this has meant learning about stewardship and responsibility: how to use natural resources without depleting them, and often by enhancing them, to preserve options for the future—in a nutshell, the very principle of sustainable development.

This knowledge, commonly described as “traditional environmental knowledge”, has been passed on through centuries of intergenerational transmission, via language and practical teachings. It has shaped ways of life and worldviews, and served material as well as psychological and spiritual needs. It has led to the development of a strong “sense of place”. Through constant innovation, this knowledge has remained alive and vibrant in those societies that have maintained a close link with and direct dependence on the local environment, such as the indigenous and other traditional local communities that represent the largest share of the world’s cultural diversity.

Supporting the resilience of indigenous and local communities is ... both a human rights imperative and an environmental one.

Environmental degradation poses an especially severe threat for these people. It deprives them of their subsistence base and the basis for their individual and social identity. It undermines their societal structure, organization and resilience. At the same time, the social, economic and political pressures that indigenous and local communities experience worldwide contribute to hastening environmental degradation. Such pressures often result in the displacement of these communities from their traditional territories, the introduction of alien value systems and ways of life, and the loss of traditional knowledge and local languages. Radical changes of this nature can lead to increasingly unsustainable relationships with the environment.
Supporting the resilience of indigenous and local communities is therefore both a human rights imperative and an environmental one. It presents special challenges as well as opportunities for all those involved in environmental protection and social justice. The indigenous movement has been leading the effort to link these two realms in the quest for ensuring their own rights.

Biocultural diversity research, originally spearheaded by a handful of organizations including Terralingua, and now actively pursued in academic and other fora, has contributed to our understanding of the links between biological and cultural diversity. Global and regional mapping of the overlaps between these diversities provide analyses of the factors accounting for these patterns and for the persistence or loss of biocultural diversity. Indicators of the state and trends of traditional environmental knowledge and of linguistic diversity can be integrated with biodiversity indicators to give us a picture of what is happening with the world's biocultural diversity. Hundreds of studies and applied projects are refining our knowledge of the connections between language, culture and the environment at the local level.

At the same time, indigenous and local groups on all continents have been involved in remarkable efforts to restore the ecocultural health of their landscapes and communities. Their activities include, among many others, revegetation, protection or reintroduction of culturally important species, and conservation and promotion of local landraces (domesticated species adapted to the local natural and cultural environment). These efforts are de facto biocultural in nature, as they often combine environmental action with cultural affirmation, knowledge transmission and language revitalization. [See the projects included in Terralingua’s Sourcebook (p. 12 of this issue) for telling examples of integrated biocultural conservation. —Ed.]

Research, advocacy and on-the-ground projects have had a key role in promoting a biocultural perspective at international as well as national levels, bringing state-of-the-art knowledge to bear on the development of guidelines for supporting biocultural diversity and its stewards worldwide. Major conservation organizations such as IUCN are beginning to recognize the importance of the links between biodiversity and cultural diversity in their statements of principles and programs of work.
Terralingua Members’ Forum Update

Due to unanticipated technical difficulties, our discussion forum was down for a while. It is now up and running again. We apologize for any inconveniences or delays in membership sign-up and participation in the forum.

Now is our chance to resume the conversation. We want to hear from you!

Join other members to discuss ideas for the future development of Terralingua.
Tell us about your experiences in the field, or stories from your homeland.
Do you have any innovative ideas about biocultural diversity in education?
This space is yours! Make it the voice of biocultural diversity!

If you are having any trouble with your user name and password, please email the webmanager at webmanager@terralingua.org.

join the discussion at www.terralingua.org

Editor’s note: These are some of the letters that I have received in my mailbox this month.

Dear Terralingua staff,
Congratulations for such wonderful Project! I am native Dutch and am interested in translating your Statement of Purpose into my mother tongue. How does this work?

regards,
C Peter Knorr

*****
Hello Terralingua:
My name is Matilde Rodriguez Vázquez. I live in Santiago de Compostela in a part of Spain called Galicia. Galician people (more than 3 million) speak Gallego [Galician], our mother language. The pressure of Spanish speakers is very strong here and we are having some difficulties in preserving the use of our language in our future. I have just heard about your organization by chance, randomly, and I thought that it would be a pleasure to me to translate your statement of purpose to Galician and disseminate your programme. But I’m not sure of what should I do. Would you be so kind to send me some instructions? Maybe I just shall translate your purpose to Galician and send it back to you. If that is all, please, let me know.

Yours faithfully
Matilde Rodriguez Vázquez

Our Statement of Purpose is now translated into 44 languages. That’s 44 out of about 7000 languages spoken today! We want more translations! Please translate our statement into your mother tongue. I have reprinted the English version of our Statement of Purpose on the following page. To find out more, please visit: http://www.terralingua.org/about/State_Trans.html
Terralingua: Statement of Purpose, English Version

Terralingua is an international organization committed to:

1. the preservation of linguistic diversity in our world;
2. the exploration of connections between linguistic and biological diversity.

Statement of Purpose
Terralingua: partnerships for linguistic and biological diversity

A. Terralingua recognizes:
   1. That the diversity of languages and their variant forms is a vital part of the world’s cultural diversity;
   2. That cultural diversity and biological diversity are not only related, but often inseparable; and
   3. That, like biological species, many languages and their variant forms around the world are now faced with an extinction crisis whose magnitude may well prove very large.

B. Terralingua declares:
   4. That every language, along with its variant forms, is inherently valuable and therefore worthy of being preserved and perpetuated, regardless of its political, demographic, or linguistic status;
   5. That deciding which language to use, and for what purposes, is a basic human right inhering to members of the community of speakers now using the language or whose ancestors traditionally used it; and
   6. That such usage decisions should be freely made in an atmosphere of tolerance and reciprocal respect for cultural distinctiveness -- a condition that is a prerequisite for increased mutual understanding among the world’s peoples and a recognition of our common humanity.

C. Therefore, Terralingua sets forth the following goals:
   7. To help preserve and perpetuate the world’s linguistic diversity in all its variant forms (languages, dialects, pidgins, creoles, sign languages, languages used in rituals, etc.) through research, programs of public education, advocacy, and community support.
   8. To learn about languages and the knowledge they embody from the communities of speakers themselves, to encourage partnerships between community-based language/cultural groups and scientific/professional organizations who are interested in preserving cultural and biological diversity, and to support the right of communities of speakers to language self-determination.
   9. To illuminate the connections between cultural and biological diversity by establishing working relationships with scientific/professional organizations and individuals who are interested in preserving cultural diversity (such as linguists, educators, anthropologists, ethnologists, cultural workers, native advocates, cultural geographers, sociologists, and so on) and those who are interested in preserving biological diversity (such as biologists, botanists, ecologists, zoologists, physical geographers, ethnobiologists, ethnoecologists, conservationists, environmental advocates, natural resource managers, and so on), thus promoting the joint preservation and perpetuation of cultural and biological diversity.
   10. To work with all appropriate entities in both the public and private sectors, and at all levels from the local to the international, to accomplish the foregoing.
Our Membership campaign continues, and we are very enthusiastic about the ongoing communication with this great network. Terralingua members receive our quarterly newsletter Langscape, are entitled to discounts on our publications and other special offers, and get occasional updates on “hot off the press” news. Members have exclusive access to the Members’ Discussion Forum, which is devoted to how Terralingua and its members can work together to achieve our shared goals.

If you would like to become a member of Terralingua, please complete the membership form on our website www.terralingua.org

If you want to know more about how to become a member, send an email to: members@terralingua.org.

For information about Terralingua’s work, please send an email to info@terralingua.org.

Have you moved or changed emails? Keep us posted! To keep receiving Langscape, please make sure we have your current email and address. Send your updates to members@terrralingua.org.
Please donate to Terralingua! We need your support to continue to work for biocultural diversity!

Where do your donations go?

You can choose to support our program work. If you wish, you can earmark your donation for one of the following projects on which we’ll be working in 2010:

* **Biocultural Diversity in Education**
* **Biocultural Diversity Conservation Web Portal**
* **Biocultural Diversity Mapping Web Portal**
* **Biocultural Diversity in Policy**
* **Eco-cultural Health in the Sierra Tarahumara, Mexico**
* **Indicators of Biocultural Diversity**

If you make this choice, please select the appropriate button on the Donate now! page on our website, or specify what project you’d like to support when you send us a check.

We also gladly receive support for Terralingua’s general operations. Any donations that are not earmarked for a specific project go into our unrestricted funds, to keep the organization going so that we can do the work.

Either way, you will be providing a much needed contribution to help us pursue our mission!

For secure online donations, please go to: www.terralingua.org.
Or send us a check at: Terralingua, 217 Baker Road, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2N6, Canada

The beautiful greeting card you see on this page is one in a line of “In a Word” cards created by our Board member Susan Fassberg to foster awareness of the beauty of languages and the tragedy of language extinction (www.connectingdotz.com). The cards celebrate unique words from around the world that have no direct English equivalent, yet express universal sentiments and experiences. Some of these words are from endangered languages spoken by just a few people. Others are from languages that are strong and healthy. All of them speak to our shared humanity.

The cards support nonprofits like Terralingua.

For a donation of $100 or more, we’ll be happy to send you a set of 6 of these cards as a thank-you gift!