

**COMMON GOOD
FOUNDATION**
Dignity Rights Justice

SDG 4: **A FAILING SCORE FOR INDIGENOUS AND MINORITY RIGHTS?**



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Residential Boarding Schools Survivors in the US:

“My great-auntie told me of being slapped for speaking the language. She spoke of the little jail where repeat offenders were imprisoned without food or water.”¹

“The sexual abuse would happen late at night when all of us were sleeping or were supposed to be sleeping. The brothers would come in and they would take somebody out. When the kids would come back they would be crying. They didn't want to be touched and they were always scared. No one ever talked about it.”²

“They tell us not to speak in Navajo language. You're going to school. You're supposed to only speak English. And it was true. They did practice that and we got punished if you was caught speaking Navajo.”³

“Nobody talks about what happened to us or our children. We all have broken hearts”⁴

¹ Louellyn White, Who Gets to Tell the Stories? Carlisle Indian School: Imagining a Place of Memory Through Descendant Voices, p.127.

² Johnson, Caitlin, and Kel Sassi, Teaching with Indigenous YA Boarding School Texts: Unsilencing Indigenous Voices, English Journal, Volume 113, Issue 1, September 2023.

³ White, note 1, p. 2.

⁴ White, note 1, p. 140.

Some governments have begun making reparations for their grim histories of forced cultural assimilation through education, but the practice is still globally prevalent. Of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), goal number 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”⁵ Practices within schools promoting cultural assimilation, primarily boarding schools, defy multiple targets within SDG4, in addition to its overall philosophy. At the same time, the core of the issue, acculturation, is left unaddressed by the UN's commitments to educational reform. Acculturation is assimilation to the predominant culture; in some cases, acculturation could be subtle and at times it could be forced. Students in countries harboring educational institutions intended for acculturation suffer from inadequate support in both active and historic systems. SDG4 does little to prevent this occurrence.

Background

In 2015, the UN set 17 SDGs to facilitate global progress in different areas over the subsequent 15 years. The problems addressed within these goals range from “[ending] poverty in all its forms everywhere” to “[conserving] and sustainably [using] the oceans.”⁶ Each goal includes varied targets, in addition to its own forums, publications, and policy solutions.⁷ As of 2023, it was projected that “none of the goals and just 12% of the targets will be met” by their termination in 2030.⁸ The shortcomings of each goal are more apparent upon individual inspection. In its Framework for Action, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) characterized SDG4's mission as “leaving no one behind.”⁹ As the goal has progressed, however, the UN has demonstrated a neglect of minority demographics.

Scoring

The UN continues to release statistics for SDG4 with a positive slant, even in countries with critical educational losses. SDG4 encompasses 10 targets, each with indicators to monitor their progress. Under target 4.1, to “ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes,” indicator 4.1.2 reports completion rates for each educational level.¹⁰ The UN's data for 2021 documented China's

⁵ United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “[The 17 Goals](#)” 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nature Editorial, [The World's Plan to Make Humanity Sustainable Is Failing. Science Can Do More to Save It](#), Vol. 618, no. 7966, June 2023, 618, 647.

⁹ Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, [Education 2030](#) (SDG4), p. 24.

¹⁰ UN 17 Goals, note 5.

primary completion rate as 98%, India's as 94%, Brazil's as 97%, and Peru's as 98%.¹¹ While these statistics describe a positive pattern, they cannot showcase that each one of these countries actively use some form of coercion to put ethnic minorities into state education programs which are harmful to their culture. Additionally, the documentation of SDG4 boasts increasing youth literacy rates under target 4.6 and indicator 4.6.1, yet this data appears to overlook the decline in the instruction and retention of indigenous and minority languages and literacy rates in those languages.¹² Examining target 4.5, which aims to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations,” the available data on inequalities in educational access only covers gender parity.¹³ Persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples are completely excluded from the data, which list promising statistics for gender equality in education.¹⁴ UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report from 2023 lists an additional indicator, 4.5.2, as the “percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction.”¹⁵ Following this, there is still no real data provided on indigenous students, and most notably, no data on indicator 4.5.2.¹⁶ The UN lacks intersectionality within SDG4 and appears to ignore indigenous and minority educational issues.

History

UNESCO claims that SDG4 “takes into account lessons learned since 2000,” yet the framework fails to account for assimilation of indigenous people, prevalent in the western hemisphere since the 1800s.¹⁷ Cultural assimilation within education developed its roots in colonization, as a means of control over indigenous populations. In education, cultural assimilation has multiple presentations, most commonly seen in the form of residential schools. Governments pressure families to put their children into institutions which purposefully erase and neglect their culture, including language, religion, and dress.¹⁸ There are many places in different parts of the world with a prolonged history of forced boarding schools for their indigenous populations that are starting to make amends. For example, the United States has acknowledged in an investigative report its federal policy of once separating children from their families.¹⁹ After the launch of the

¹¹ Our World in Data, [SDG Tracker: Measuring Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#), July 18, 2023.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See 17 Goals, note 5, and SDG Tracker, note 11.

¹⁴ See SDG Tracker, note 11.

¹⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report Team, [Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: technology in education: a tool on whose terms?](#), 2023, p.258-267.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Incheon Declaration, note 9, p. 25.

¹⁸ IFSW, [Acknowledging the Impact of Indigenous Residential Schools: Commemorating Orange Shirt Day](#), September 28, 2023.

¹⁹ Ibid.

report, Deborah Holland, the First Native American Secretary of the Interior, went on a “Healing Tour” to hear from survivors and raise awareness about the harms inflicted on Native communities.²⁰

In Australia, the government issued an apology in 2008, “recognizing the historical and on-going harm done by the federal policy of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities.”²¹

Sadly, the use of assimilation in education is not part of a bygone era. The Roma in Europe, with significantly lower academic performance than their peers, continue to learn in segregated facilities in some countries— in 2023, the European parliament released a statement attributing “discriminatory treatment” to “structural and institutional anti-Roma prejudice,” saying it “is often compounded by national education systems that are not adapted to working with children from different social and ethnic backgrounds and vulnerable groups.”²² The educational impacts of prejudice are not unique nor solved in any of these cases.

Learning Conditions

Residential schools cultivate an unsafe environment for students. Programs take students from their homes to immerse them in a preferred culture, while exposing children to a variety of traumatizing conditions. From different forms of abuse to a lack of resources, “research has observed that the level of subjective well-being of [children and adolescents in residential care] is lower than that of their peers in the normative population.”²³ This study is corroborated by the situation throughout Europe, wherein “schools attended by Roma children often have insufficient capacity, operate on two shifts, are situated in separate, run-down buildings or container schools and offer a substandard quality of education.”²⁴ In a voluntary study sampling from the 246 residential schools in Peru, “51% of respondent's reported having suffered some type of violence from teachers, with a prevalence significantly higher in primary school as compared to secondary school.”²⁵ Ashram schools in India, in effect since the 1920s, are reported to have “poor conditions of classrooms, lack of desks, leakage and seepage on walls, scarcity of bedding, unavailable or ill-maintained toilets and bathrooms leading to open defecation, cases of molestation and sexual

²⁰ Levi Rickert and Darren Thompson, ‘Road to Healing’ Visits Arizona to Hear from Boarding School Survivors Descendants, Native News Online, January 22, 2023.

²¹ IFSW, note 18.

²² European Parliament, Segregation and discrimination of Roma children in education, October 4, 2023.

²³ Harry Ortúzar, et al, Teacher Violence, School Satisfaction and Subjective Well-being in Children and Adolescents in Residential Care: The Moderation Effect of Staff Support, *Children & Society* 35 (6). p 852.

²⁴ See note 11.

²⁵ Ortuzar, note 23, p. 848.

harassment of girl students, recurring incidents of death, poor health and nutritional condition and many other issues related to it.”²⁶ Outright, conditions within these schools violate target 4.a, to “build and upgrade education facilities that ... provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.”²⁷ Though violence can occur in other educational structures, such as mass shootings in schools throughout the US, there is a connection between residential schools and a neglect for student wellbeing. Under acculturation, students are placed in non-inclusive and unsafe environments.

In the US boarding schools, indigenous children were often put to work doing manual labor for the profit of the school.²⁸ This phenomenon still persists in other parts of the world as “indigenous children face a higher risk of child labour than other children,” exploited in the fields of agriculture, mining, trafficking, and sex work.²⁹ Among other factors, such as poverty and migration, this risk is attributed to the observation that “where data is available, the school attendance of indigenous children... is lower than for other children.”³⁰ Likewise, high dropout rates for indigenous students are linked to their low cultural representation in the classroom.³¹ Following this logic, an inference could be made between the disproportionate number of indigenous children in the child labor force and the existence of acculturation in education.

The nature of these schools creates a more vulnerable environment for female students. In residential schools throughout Africa, “violence inflicted by teachers against girls is reported to have 86% prevalence in Kenya, followed by 82% in Ghana and 66% in Mozambique.”³² Meanwhile, target 4.5 is oriented to “eliminate gender disparities in education...including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.”³³ Not only is violence prevalent within residential schools, but discrimination against these minority groups is exacerbated for girls. In terms of dropout rates, “the attendance gap is particularly pronounced for indigenous girls.”³⁴ These targets all conflict with the manner in which cultural assimilation is conducted through education, but cultural preservation is only explicitly referenced in target 4.7 as an “appreciation of cultural diversity” through the context of sustainability.³⁵ Acculturation is unaccounted for within the targets, resulting in inaccurate assessments of SDG4 for countries engaging in this practice.

²⁶ Virginus Xaxa, Education, Assimilation and Cultural Marginalisation of Tribes in India, Economic and Political Weekly, N.A, September 4, 2021. *Also referring to* Joyita Ghose, Standing Committee Report Summary Working of Ashram Schools in Tribal Areas, PRS Legislative Search, 2014.

²⁷ See note 5.

²⁸ See note 19.

²⁹ International Labour Organization, Issue paper on child labour and education exclusion among indigenous children, September 25, 2023.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ortuzar, note 23, p.851.

³³ See note 5.

³⁴ International Labour Organization, note 29, p. vi.

³⁵ See note 5.

Tibet

Currently, one of the most severe cases of forced acculturation is the educational system implemented by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Tibet. As the PRC cracks down on Tibetan identity, “nearly 1 million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and communities and forced into colonial boarding schools.”³⁶ The PRC uses the same coercive tactics that the United States used to implement in its residential schools. To transfer Tibetan students into the boarding schools, “the Government of the PRC has spent the past several years forcibly closing local schools as well as private schools across Tibet,” leaving Tibetan children with no other option.³⁷ This alone violates SDG4 targets 4.1 and 4.2 detailing fair access to education.³⁸ Successfully pulling Tibetan children away from their own culture, within this system, “preschool boarding school students lose their ability to speak in Tibetan after three to six months.”³⁹ Apart from the restriction of language, “Tibetan children are outright forbidden from [practicing] their religion while at school.”⁴⁰ The isolation and deprivation of culture maintained by these institutions covers every area. PRC President Xi Jinping accelerated the process after his election in 2012, “while boarding schools in Tibet have been operating since 1979, it is only since [he] came to power that they were opened for preschool-aged students,” which are the most impressionable demographic.⁴¹

The UN has only recently started to examine this situation as it sent a letter to the PRC in 2022, followed by an official statement by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2023. However, the PRC has not issued a formal response.⁴² In 2023, the United States placed visa restrictions on officials who are involved in the forced assimilation⁴³ which is a small step towards accountability, but more needs to be done given the tremendous impact this will have on future generations of Tibetan children.

³⁶ Tibet Action Institute, [UN women’s rights body calls on China to abolish coercive residential schools in Tibet and provide Tibetan women and girls with access to Tibetan language education](#), May 30, 2023.

³⁷ Ali Ehsassi, [The human rights situation of Tibetans and the Chinese residential boarding school and preschool system](#), Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development; 19th report, 44th Parliament, 1st session, January 18, 2024, p. 18.

³⁸ See note 5.

³⁹ Ehsassi, note 37, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 22.

⁴¹ Ibid, 18.

⁴² Ibid, 26.

⁴³ Tibet Action Institute, [US Secretary Blinken Announces Action Against Colonial Boarding Schools in Tibet, Visa Restrictions on PRC Officials Tied to Assimilation of 1M Tibetan Children](#), August 22, 2023.

Brazil

In the case of Brazil, cultural assimilation sits further toward the developmental stage, with educational outcomes for its indigenous populations becoming increasingly unfavorable. Overall, “the number of Indigenous schools in Brazil has grown markedly over the past 12 years, totaling 1,633 for every one million Indigenous people in states with the largest Indigenous populations.”⁴⁴ This would be a positive trend, except the former Bolsonaro administration increased its control over Brazil’s indigenous populations, due to economic incentives provided by land resources in the Amazon.⁴⁵ This circumstance provides significant motivation for the acculturation tactics which have been implemented within Brazil’s indigenous schools.

The Djekupe Amba Arandy State School, providing for six indigenous areas, teaches Portuguese but not Guarani, the local language, from kindergarten through 5th grade.⁴⁶ Similar to Tibetan schools, there is an emphasis on limiting the exposure of the youngest children to only the predominant language. Compiled with low proportions of indigenous teachers, non-indigenous teachers were documented to view both indigenous students and indigenous customs as disruptive.⁴⁷ In another school, the Txeru Ba’e Kua-i Indigenous State School, interferences with culture include discouraging of students’ attendance to prayer sessions, preventing children from going barefoot to school, and composing of all writing and textbooks in Portuguese rather than Guarani.⁴⁸

Downgrades in educational materials for the indigenous populations of Brazil also frustrate the purpose of SDG4. In the Amazonas, the percentage of teachers who instructed in the local language decreased from 23 to 1 from 2013 to 2022.⁴⁹ For reference, with indicator 4.6.1, Brazil expressed a youth literacy rate of 99.2% in 2021.⁵⁰ This rate, however, cannot reflect the indigenous languages lost to state curriculums, or local comprehension rates among students not learning in their mother tongue. Regions are also facing a stark decline in the presence of indigenous cultural elements within the classroom. Falling from 44% in 2010, “by the culmination of the year 2022, a mere 4% of educational institutions within the state opted to integrate these culturally relevant materials into their pedagogical practices.”⁵¹ The enduring omission of language and culture from curriculums inhibit indigenous students in Brazil from reaching targets 4.1, in accordance with obtaining relevant and effective learning outcomes, and 4.4, in accordance with obtaining relevant

⁴⁴ Andre Goncalves, et al, Indigenous Schools in Brazil as a tool for acculturation, Nature, October 2023, 622.

⁴⁵ Andre Goncalves, Indigenous in Brazil: School as a Mechanism of Forced Insertion into Society, September 22, 2023.

⁴⁶ Elie Ghanem, et al, Choice of Knowledge in Indigenous Schools: Two Guarani Cases (Sao Paulo, Brazil), 2022.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See note 45.

⁵⁰ See note 11.

⁵¹ Goncalves, note 45, p. 12-13.

skills, as they are not being equipped with an education applicable to their own environment.⁵² Altogether, these shortcomings demonstrate the inability of SDG4 to properly address the preservation of language and cultural knowledge. Additionally, Brazil's movement parallels the PRC in Tibet. Given historical contexts, and current statistical trends, Brazil's indigenous schools have the potential to deteriorate further. It is hopeful under President Lula da Silva that educational reforms which protect indigenous children can be achieved.⁵³

Canada

While in some areas the educational environment regresses, in countries no longer engaging in forced acculturation, problems still exist within the structure that remains. Beginning with the Indian Act of 1876 and lasting over a century, Canada had one of the most intense histories of acculturation for its First Nations population, with 140 residential schools encompassing around 150,000 indigenous children.⁵⁴ Following the discovery of unmarked mass burial sites on the grounds of these schools, the state has made reparations through monetary settlements to survivors, formal apologies, and an official recognition of the occurrence as genocide.⁵⁵ Canada also created The Residential Schools Missing Children Community Support to help First Nations communities identify burial sites.⁵⁶

While the Canadian government attempts to amend the psychological damages done, actual academic support for First Nations children remains poor, especially for those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). There is an “established susceptibility of the descendants of Indian Residential School survivors to a variety of mental and physical health disorders [or neurocognitive or developmental issues] through intergenerational transmission,” among these being ADHD and autism.⁵⁷ Legal and historical barriers prevent indigenous families from receiving educational support for their children with ASD and the development of indigenous children on the spectrum is heavily overlooked.⁵⁸ This corresponds to target 4.a, to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.”⁵⁹ Even within the medical field, indigenous children are over-diagnosed with fetal alcohol

⁵² See note 5.

⁵³ Raphael Garcia, [Brazil's Lula Is Back in Power, but the Indigenous Have Little to Celebrate](#), Newsweek, February 19, 2024.

⁵⁴ Government of Canada, [Residential Schools and Reconciliation](#).

⁵⁵ An apology was also given by Pope Francis, on behalf of [the Vatican](#).

⁵⁶ See note 54.

⁵⁷ P. Bennett, et al, [Canadian School Psychology and Indigenous Peoples: Opportunities and Recommendations](#), Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 2023, 38(1), 10-29.

⁵⁸ Gerlach et al, [Autism and Autism Services with Indigenous Families and Children in the Settler-Colonial Context of Canada: A Critical Scoping Review](#), Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 2022, Vol 11, No 22.

⁵⁹ See note 5.

spectrum disorders and underdiagnosed with ASD, because stereotypes created in the residential school era “contribute to an inaccurate or delayed diagnosis of autism.”⁶⁰ In 2015, UNESCO set “[collecting] better-quality data on children with disabilities” as one of their strategies for reaching target 4.5.⁶¹ On the contrary, a 2023 study documented a low prevalence of research studies and literature on indigenous children with ASD, indicating little progress in this area since the inception of SDG4.⁶² The manner in which First Nations children with ASD and ADHD are handled by the education and healthcare systems of Canada reveal more insufficiencies within SDG4.

This same phenomenon has been documented in other regions with histories of acculturation, including New Zealand, Brazil, Taiwan, and Europe. In New Zealand, which experienced a deliberate assimilation of the Māori people from 1950 - 1980, research on ADHD treatment for Māori individuals is nearly nonexistent.⁶³ Additionally, the UN has advised that New Zealand eliminate its residential specialist schools for students with disabilities, particularly ASD and learning impairments.⁶⁴ One of these schools, Westbridge, claims a 90% success rate for its students.⁶⁵ The historical impact of residential schools on Māori children, however, cannot be left out of the consideration of New Zealand’s current residential school system. The connection between the marginalization of Māori students and inconsistencies among indigenous populations with respect to learning disabilities corroborates the UN’s suggestion. In Europe, this phenomenon is laid out more clearly. Within the Roma population, “misdiagnosis based on the results of culturally and linguistically biased, as well as discriminatory and racist, tests and tools affect the educational path of Roma pupils, especially those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background... these tests identify Roma pupils as having mild mental disabilities and they are therefore systematically placed in special schools for mentally disabled children.”⁶⁶ The European Union exploited segregation on the basis of disability when segregation on the basis of ethnicity was no longer viable. In Brazil, a study done to combat the lack of research on ADHD within indigenous cultures found that, in the Amazon, the distribution of indigenous children and adolescents with ADHD matches the global pattern.⁶⁷ The stereotypes that obstruct accurate diagnosis in regions with historical assimilation also permeate Brazilian indigenous schools.⁶⁸ Support for indigenous students in the classroom and medical field remains scarce, exemplified by the resources provided for indigenous individuals with ASD and ADHD diagnoses.

⁶⁰ Gerlach, note 58, p.14.

⁶¹ Incheon Declaration, note 9, p.46.

⁶² Grant Bruno, et al, Indigenous Autism in Canada: A Scoping Review, Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2023.

⁶³ Diana Kopua and Paul Skirrow, Racism, Mātauranga Māori and ADHD: An Interview With Dr Diana Kopua, Journal of the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists, 2023, 331(1), 72-78.

⁶⁴ Jessica Roden, Future of NZ's schools for students with high needs remains in limbo, 1 News, September 20, 2023.

⁶⁵ See Westbridge website.

⁶⁶ See note 22.

⁶⁷ E Azevêdo et al, Suggestive diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in indigenous children and adolescents from the Brazilian Amazon, European Child Adolescent Psychiatry, March 2020.

⁶⁸ See note 46.

Relevant UN Instruments

The following international instruments oblige countries to respect the right to education and emphasize that it should be provided in a manner that respects human dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. SDG4 should be examined in conjunction with the obligations governments already have under multiple international instruments to provide education in a dignified manner without violating the human rights of the those receiving an education.

The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

ICESCR, under Article 13, states that parties to the Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. The Covenant emphasizes free compulsory education for all, in addition to emphasizing respect for dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. Article 13 (3) directs parties to the Covenant to “have respect for the liberty of parents...to choose for their children, schools other than those established by public authorities...”⁶⁹ In the General Comment to Article 13, the ICESCR committee highlights, “education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and controlling population growth.”⁷⁰ States also have a specific legal obligation to take “positive measures to ensure that education is culturally appropriate for minorities and indigenous peoples...”⁷¹

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Under CRC Article 28, a child has a right to an education and under Article 29, State parties agree that the education of the child be directed to “develop respect for the child's parents, [their] own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.”⁷² Article 30 specifically speaks to children belonging to minority and indigenous communities, “a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy [their] own culture, to profess and practice [their] own religion or to use [their] own language.”⁷³ In a General Comment to

⁶⁹ ICESCR, Article 13 (1) and (3). Article 14 also discusses compulsory education.

⁷⁰ Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “General Comment No. 13,” Twenty-first session, 1999.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, para 50.

⁷² CRC, Article 28 and 29.

⁷³ CRC, Article 30.

Article 30, the CRC Committee emphasizes “that cultural practices provided by article 30 of the Convention must be exercised in accordance with other provisions of the Convention and under no circumstances may be justified if deemed prejudicial to the child’s dignity, health and development.”⁷⁴

The Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

CERD obliges State parties to “prohibit and eliminate” racial discrimination in all its forms, in the enjoyment of rights, including the right to education and training.⁷⁵ Article 7 encourages States to “adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination...”⁷⁶

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW Article 10 mandates that State parties to the Convention take all appropriate measures to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education. The Committee on CEDAW notes,

“certain factors disproportionately prevent girls and women from claiming and enjoying their basic human right to education. Such factors include barriers to access for girls and women from disadvantaged and marginalized groups, exacerbated by poverty and economic crises, gender stereotyping in curricula, textbooks and teaching processes, violence against girls and women in and out of school and structural and ideological restrictions to their engagement in male - dominated academic and vocational fields.”⁷⁷

The Committee concludes, “to meet the criterion of non-discrimination, education must be accessible, in both law and practice, to all girls and women, including those belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, without discrimination on any prohibited ground.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General Comment No. 11,” February 12, 2009.

⁷⁵ CERD, Article 5.

⁷⁶ CERD, Article 7.

⁷⁷ Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, “General Comment 39,” November 27, 2017.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, para 20.

Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, International Labour Organisation (ILO 169)

ILO 169 has several Articles that discuss the importance for children to access educational opportunities in their own languages and a curriculum which emphasizes their own cultures. Article 26 reiterates that Indigenous children are provided equality in access to education. Article 27 mandates that educational programs are developed in cooperation with Peoples, and “incorporate their histories, their knowledge and technologies, their value systems and their further social, economic and cultural aspirations.”⁷⁹ Article 28 emphasizes that children be taught to read and write in their indigenous languages. Articles 29, 30, and 31 echo provisions found in ICESCR and CERD.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

UNDRIP echoes the aspirations and obligations found in the binding instruments highlighted above. UNDRIP focuses on providing indigenous peoples the right to establish and control their education. Further, States should work in conjunction with indigenous peoples to access education in their own culture and in their own language.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Education is still used as a vessel for cultural assimilation today, leaving persisting challenges for students, families, and teachers around the world. None of these cases are isolated, nor unique. This report has identified ways in which education is being used as a tool to eliminate the traditions of minority and indigenous communities. SDG4 has both failed to address the matter directly and failed to reduce acculturation within education globally. The United Nations must do more to examine how it measures standards for achieving SDG4 and take special note of whether the data that is presented may have problems due the challenges highlighted in this report. Further, governments must remember that in working towards achieving their targets under SDG4 that they must also continue to uphold their binding treaty obligations and protect and promote the human rights of minority and indigenous children while they obtain an education.

⁷⁹ Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), [Article 27](#).

⁸⁰ UNDRIP, [Article 14](#).