The Issue of access to education for indigenous youth.

Access to education remains a fundamental human right, yet indigenous youth around the world face significant barriers in obtaining quality education. Indigenous communities often reside in remote and marginalised areas, where education infrastructure is lacking, and cultural biases may hinder their access to mainstream education systems. In Australia's Northern Territory, where 39% of the student population is Indigenous – government funding to public schools has fallen by 7.75%, and in the wider area of Western Australia, it had fallen by 5.6%. Education systems across the world often fail to cater to the particular needs of Indigenous Peoples, with obstacles including a lack of teachers who speak Indigenous languages.

This issue is multi-faceted, and the barriers that these peoples face goes far beyond proximity to resources. Indigenous children are more likely to arrive at school hungry, ill, and tired, are often bullied, and the use of corporal punishment is still widespread. Ethnic and cultural discrimination at schools are major obstacles to equal access to education, causing poor performance and higher dropout rates. Furthermore, when indigenous school children are introduced only to the national customs at the expense of their native customs, they are in danger of losing part of their identity, their connection with their parents and predecessors, which can be discouraging and decrease the likelihood of attendance. Modern education curriculums offered by the state typically promote individualism and a competitive atmosphere, rather than the communal ways of life and cooperation.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented global disruption to education systems, however highlighted and exacerbated in particular the disparities in the lack of access to education for Indigenous peoples. The pandemic magnified the 'digital divide' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students even further, as many of these children, especially in rural areas, lacked access to the devices and internet connection to access virtual classes. These impacts could have been avoided if governments accounted for the needs of Indigenous students in their Covid-19 response plans. This failure to consult with marginalised groups resulted in Indigenous Peoples being denied of some of their most fundamental rights.

Progress is being made, as in 2018, UNESCO developed, in cooperation with indigenous peoples and member states, the 'Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues' and 'The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', and action plan for the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages. However,

more considerations need to be implemented, including training incentives for teachers to work in indigenous communities with a focus on cultural sensitivity. Governments should involve indigenous communities in the design of educational programs to ensure cultural relevance, as well as perhaps providing scholarships and financial assistance to indigenous students to help overcome socio-economic barriers.

Points to consider:

- How can member states recognise the importance of valuing indigenous knowledge systems within the education system and how they promote intercultural understanding?
- What policies can governments develop that address systemic discrimination and corporal punishment?
- How should education systems be regularly monitored to assess their impact on indigenous youth and identify areas of improvement?
- Should resources be focussed primarily on areas in the world with a higher proportion of indigenous population?

Useful Links

https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2009/10/importance-indigenous-education-and-culture-highlighted-permanent-forum

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26609275

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1440783318794295

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343757363_Education_in_the_Post-Pandemic_Era_Indigenous_Children_and_Youth