

UNITY IN BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY
TOGETHER, WE CAN!



Terralingua

Annual Report 2013





"Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" Paul Gauguin, 1897. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Salt Spring Island, December 2013

Dear Terralingua Friends and Supporters,

These days, I'm in a contemplative mood. Maybe it's because the end of the year is nearing, which always seems conducive to looking back and reflecting. But the fact is that I'm finding myself thinking more than usual of that eternal question—to borrow the title of Paul Gauguin's famed 1897 painting: *"Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?"*

In posing that three-way question, Gauguin was thinking of the deep existential meaning of human life, such as we may glimpse it as we go through the stages of our individual development, from early childhood to old age and, as he put it, "the Beyond". In a world ever more destabilized by environmental destruction, cultural upheaval, and social injustice, that existential question extends from our individual destiny to our global fate, and in this sense is just as vital and pressing. It certainly is always high on my mind, as a powerful motivator for our work at Terralingua.

As humans, we come from a long history of interconnectedness and interdependence with the natural world, of which we are an intrinsic part. We are what we are, as a species, largely because of how we have been molded by that symbiotic, mutually adaptive relationship with nature. But where we are going today, as a global society, seems to be determined to a great extent by a profound disconnect from these fundamental realities. As our human population balloons out of control, the impact of our ever more rapacious technologies and increasingly materialistic and consumeristic ways of life is reaching far and wide, with dire consequences for both people and the planet. But we continue to careen forward, toward an uncertain "beyond", as if blinded to the very real fact that whatever we do to the health of the planet we

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“We need another story that will help us remember or imagine a universe filled with a rainbow of values, an infinitude of life forms, a bounty of places, an abundance of lifeways, a cornucopia of experiences. Or rather we need a multiplicity of stories. Biocultural diversity may very well be that inexhaustible fountain of stories.”

-Felipe Montoya Greenheck (from his guest editorial in Langscape 2:12, “Biocultural Diversity: An Emerging Paradigm in a Changing world”)

do to ourselves. Or perhaps we do realize what we’re doing—but here we are, riding this destructive juggernaut that we don’t know how to stop.

It’s a scary prospect, and we may be tempted to tune out and forget. But it’s a temptation we must resist—because there is hope. After all, just as we have been the source of the problem, we can be the source of solutions. It is, ultimately, only a matter of values—of what we choose to value the most. As my partner in life and work, David Rapport, wrote a few years ago, the question we must ask here is: *“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. If there is to be hope for a viable future, ecological and cultural health must become a primary goal of humankind.”* (How Are We Doing? Resurgence 250, September-October 2008, Web Exclusives)

The good news is, we can do it! Working together, can achieve a world of *“Unity in Biocultural Diversity”*—which is our motto and motivation here at Terralingua: a world of diverse, vibrant, resilient, and mutually respectful cultures living in a dynamically harmonious relationship with a healthy, vital, thriving natural world. It always begins with the first step, and with feeling joy for every small thing we can do that is going in the right direction. Mindful of that, as I look back at this year’s work I feel special joy for some of the things we were able to do: small, yet profound affirmations of the beauty and bounty of life in nature and culture. I want to share some of these with you.

I’m thinking of the visioning retreat and language “bootcamp” that the Language Apprentices of the **Saanich First Nation** of southern British Columbia (BC) and their Elders held in July right here on Salt Spring Island (which forms part of Saanich traditional territory and is the site of a small Saanich Reserve). The Saanich are down to only a handful of fluent or semi-fluent aging speakers, so this work is incredibly urgent. For the past couple of years, we have been contributing to their efforts by supporting the documentation and publication of some of their *traditional stories*. This year, we were able to provide some support for this milestone language retreat, and to find a suitable location for it on the island, the beautiful Stowel Lake Farm. The Saanich Apprentices’ goals for the retreat were to plan the future of their language revitalization program, and to carry out their first-ever total language immersion event: a full day of speaking exclusively in their mother tongue. As program coordinator Tye Swallow movingly put it: *“The day was monumental in the sense that it has probably been decades, even generations, where that many people only used Senchothen to communicate for a whole day. ... Hopefully this event was the first of many to come!”* And so we dearly wish, too! The Saanich Language Apprentices are carrying the torch admirably for the life of their language and of the ancestral place-base wisdom infused within it.

And I’m thinking, too, of the tireless efforts that our other partner, **Tsilhqot’in First Nation** linguist and advocate Linda Smith, is making to protect the cultural and natural heritage of her people in south-central BC, against mining,



Terralingua teamed up with Xhosa students and teachers to create a video for our biocultural education project. Photo: Tony Dold



Our new membership portal has just been launched as a way to better engage and nurture our amazing network. Check it out at www.terralinguaubuntu.org.

logging, and other encroaching development. For over two decades, the Tsilhqot'in have been fighting a proposed gold-copper mine that would destroy or irreparably damage a significant portion of their territory. This area, known as Nabas, comprises fish-bearing lakes and streams and

ancestral places of great cultural and spiritual importance to the Tsilhqot'in. Two Canadian Federal environmental assessment reviews (2010 and 2013) have come down against this mining proposal, citing serious environmental and cultural impacts. Yet the final decision now rests with the government of Canada, which might yet decide to give the mine the go-ahead "in the national interest". What's more, illegal clear-cut logging and hunting continue unchecked in Tsilhqot'in territory, as if it were a "free for all", although the Tsilhqot'in have never ceded title over their lands. With partial support from Terralingua, Linda has been recording from Tsilhqot'in elders the *oral traditions* relevant to the areas that are, or would be, affected by these unwanted developments. The elders, several of whom are aging and frail, are sharing previously undocumented knowledge about these sites. This urgent work is providing invaluable material not only for Tsilhqot'in language and culture revitalization, but also for the defense of their lands and way of life.

Both of these projects were made possible, this year, exclusively by the funds that you, our friends and supporters, donated to Terralingua's *Voices of the Earth* project, which went 100% to supporting the efforts of the Saanich and Tsilhqot'in. That is true solidarity at work! A very special thank-you to all of you who helped make these vital efforts happen. I hope that you'll choose to renew your support with your generous *donations*.

Another great joy this year has come from a collaboration we established with our South African colleagues Michelle Cocks and Tony Dold, as a part of our *Biocultural Diversity Education Initiative (BCDEI)*. The BCDEI (supported by the Berman Foundation) aims to produce educational curriculum on biocultural diversity for high schools, inspire students to become involved with the crucial issues of biocultural diversity worldwide, and promote an integrated biocultural approach to education—a new way of teaching and learning based on meaningful, transformative experience. With expert help from our education advisor Prof. Carla Paciotto, we are developing curriculum materials to illustrate concepts and issues in biocultural diversity by drawing from real-life examples. One example is the biocultural education program "Inckubeko Nendalo" (Culture and Nature), which Michelle and Tony carry out with Xhosa youth living in urban townships in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The program is meant to re-instill the value of nature and traditional environmental knowledge in these youth, who have become disconnected from their natural and cultural heritage. A grant from Lush Cosmetics Charitable Giving allowed us to support the making of a video, in which Inckubeko Nendalo students talk about the Xhosa language and the traditional environmental knowledge with which the language is imbued, and describe their experience reconnecting with



Members of Elawi Women's Group sharing a Maasai song at a community meeting in Naivasha. (Photo: Sarah Wright, 2013, from her article "We Dance with What We Have", in Langscape 2:12)

nature and their cultural tradition. One lesson in our curriculum will focus on this lively video and illustrate the links between language, traditional knowledge, and the environment as seen through the eyes of Xhosa people. We plan to include similar "real-life" materials throughout the curriculum.

And I certainly couldn't be counting our blessings and fail to mention how thrilled I am with the way in which our magazine *Langscape* has blossomed in the hands of our editor-in-chief extraordinaire Ortixia Dilts! Ortixia has brought *Langscape* to entirely new heights, taking to heart its role as an "extension of the voice of Terralingua" and its mission to "promote a paradigm shift by illustrating biocultural diversity through scientific and traditional knowledge, within an elegant sensory context of articles, stories and art". Since last year, she has been producing amazingly thoughtful, creative, and attractive guest-edited issues, which are truly serving the vital goal of educating the minds and hearts of people about the importance and value of biocultural diversity. If you read last year's two issues (on documenting oral traditions and on sacred natural sites), and if you have enjoyed this year's first issue, which we just recently released (number one in a two-part series on

emerging paradigms in biocultural diversity), I believe you'll agree with me that *Langscape* is well on its way to becoming a world-class publication—one that will make not just the voice of Terralingua, but the voice of biocultural diversity itself ring far and wide. Look out for the second issue in the series, coming out soon! And, while so far the magazine has been distributed electronically as a PDF, for those of you who—like me—still prefer holding a physical object in your hands when you read, we have begun to make the magazine available in print upon request. Hard copies of the past issue (*Langscape 11*) can be ordered at www.terralinguaubuntu.org/langscape-hard-copy, and hard copies of the current issue (*Langscape 12*) will be available soon.

But then, as I think back to the year that's drawing to a close, I realize that there is another sense in which I'm pondering Gauguin's question. That other sense has to do with the past, present, and future of Terralingua. It's been more than 17 years since we came into existence as a small international NGO with a mission to "sustain the biocultural diversity of life — the world's precious heritage of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity — through an innovative program of research, education, policy-relevant work, and on-the-ground action". When we launched

the concept of biocultural diversity with our inaugural conference “Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments” (Berkeley, California, 1996), the idea of the links between biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity was in the air, but it had hardly been explored in any systematic way. The book that resulted from the conference, *On Biocultural Diversity* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) laid the foundations for research and action in this newly emerging field. The research that followed—from the *first global mappings of biocultural diversity* to ground-breaking biocultural indicators (*Index of Linguistic Diversity, Vitality Index of Traditional Knowledge*, to in-depth review and analysis of on-the-ground biocultural conservation (*Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook*, Earthscan, 2010)—has helped establish biocultural diversity as a field in academia, and as an integrative approach for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage worldwide.

As a way to bring together in an easily accessible format some of the key results of this research and other relevant work, this year we undertook another project, the *Biocultural Diversity Toolkit*, with support from the Swift Foundation. The Toolkit is a set of five small volumes that cover topics ranging from an introduction to biocultural diversity, to assessing the state and trends of linguistic diversity and traditional environmental knowledge, to documenting and revitalizing oral traditions, to biocultural approaches to conservation and development. The Toolkit is nearly complete, and when ready it will be distributed widely to intended users in academia, international and community organizations, and the general public.

This latest effort sums up much of “where we come from” at Terralingua. “What we are” now is certainly the fruit of what we did up to now, but also contains the seeds of our transition to “where we are going” from here. And where we are going, we feel, is more and more toward enhancing and expanding the education and outreach aspects of our work. If that change in values that I spoke of above is going to happen, it is going to happen through an intensive effort to convey as broadly as possible the vital importance of biocultural diversity—and of a biocultural approach not only to research, practice, and education, but to life itself. This effort calls for communicating with the general public, and particularly youth, in a variety of forms—from

educational materials and writings to storytelling, poetry, visual expressions, and more—and for using a variety of media—including today’s online tools and social media. Our emerging education curriculum and the new version of *Langscape* are two meaningful steps in this direction.

The third step we’ve taken to move toward Terralingua’s future is the creation of a new site—separate from but connected to our main site—that is entirely devoted to enhancing and expanding our connections with our network of friends and supporters like you, and to give you a greater voice within Terralingua. We call it “*Terralingua Ubuntu*” (www.terralinguaubuntu.org) and it was created through the combined effort and dedication of Ortixia Dilts and our newest collaborator, Christine Arpita, both of whom I want to thank here for accomplishing what turned out to be a major undertaking. If you haven’t visited the Ubuntu already, I warmly invite you to do so, and find out how you can get more involved, become a member, and take part in discussions on our members’ forum. Join, introduce yourselves, and have your say! On the Ubuntu site, you can also easily access our publications for purchase, including *Langscape*, and *donate to support our cause*. In the course of next year, we’ll be in closer contact with all of you, to hear from you and explore ways in which, together, we can work for Unity in Biocultural Diversity. Together, we can!

I couldn’t end this look back at the year past without acknowledging all those who made it possible for us to do what we did. In addition to the Berman Foundation, Swift Foundation, Lush Cosmetics Charitable Giving, and your donations, which supported our projects, we are also deeply grateful to The Christensen Fund and Kalliopeia Foundation for their general support. Thank you all, wholeheartedly, for believing in our work!

On behalf of us all at Terralingua, warmest wishes for the upcoming holidays and the new year. May we begin to find a path toward a bioculturally rich and thriving future!

All best,



Luisa Maffi, Ph.D.

Terralingua Co-founder and Director

Terralingua

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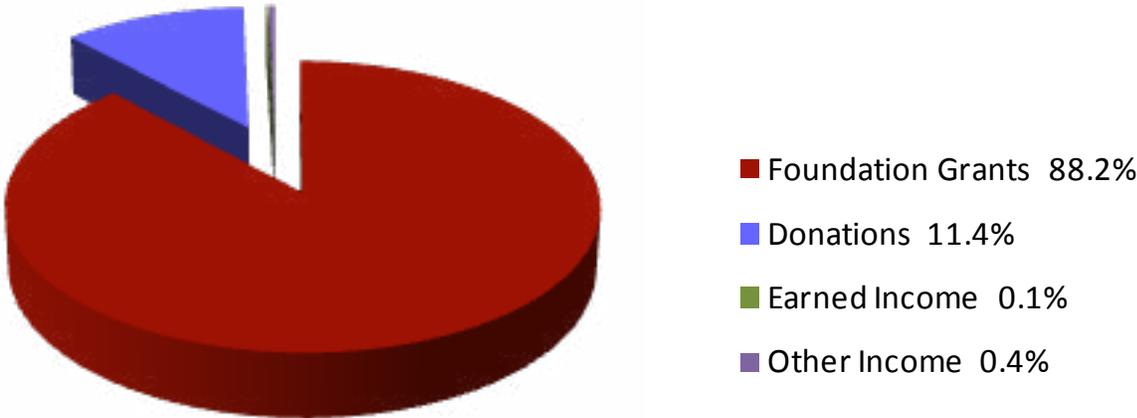
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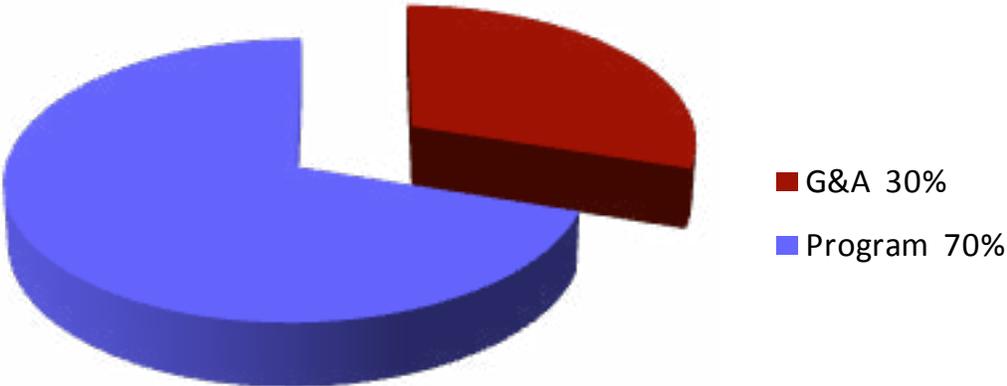
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