



MEDIA RELEASE

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PNG's indigenous languages need to be protected

A Papua New Guinean educationist and socio-linguist fears that if nothing is done to preserve and promote PNG's languages, they will be lost forever.

Education Research Program Leader with the PNG National Research Institute (PNG NRI), Dr. Kilala Devette-Chee, stated that it is imperative that more attention is given to the preservation of, and literacy in PNG languages.

"The best strategy is to embed these languages in the national education system using a different approach from the previous which encouraged bilingual education only as a bridge to learning English, and did not help with the development of vernacular languages and their cultures," she said.

Dr. Devette-Chee's research report, published as PNG NRI Spotlight Volume 14, Issue 14 entitled: *Papua New Guinea languages at a crossroad in lieu of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) 2022-2032*, highlights the need and ways of saving the more than 850 PNG languages as a contribution to the literature on IDIL 2022-2032 with specific focus on PNG's linguistic situation and possible ways of preserving its languages.

Her study found that PNG is one of the countries in the Pacific that is now vulnerable to losing its languages due to the heavy use of Tok Pisin and English.

"A new study which surveyed and tested more than 6,000 secondary school students in PNG speaking 392 languages found that only 58 percent of the students compared to 91 percent of their parents were fluent in their mother tongue," Dr. Devette-Chee stated.

"This decline in language competence among PNG's populace is alarmingly worrying as it is driven by the process of an increase in the sharing of mixed-language families where each parent speaks a different indigenous language as well as life-style changes, particularly urbanisation."

The IDIL 2022-2032 aims, among its main objectives, to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalise and promote them.

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