



# ECOSF NEWSLETTER



## Corona Virus - COVID 19: Situation in Numbers in the ECO Member Countries

Country	Total confirmed cases due to COVID-19	Total confirmed deaths due to COVID-19
Afghanistan	55,023	2,400
Azerbaijan	230,219	3,132
Iran	1,420,000	57,959
Kazakhstan	235,844	3,046
Kyrgyzstan	84,588	1,412
Pakistan	546,428	11,683
Tajikistan	13,308	90
Turkey	2,480,000	25,993
Turkmenistan	-	-
Uzbekistan	78,711	621
ECO region Total	5,144,121	106,336

**Date Stamp:** January 31, 2021

**Source:** <https://ourworldindata.org>

**Note:** So far, no case has been reported in Turkmenistan.

## 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) held virtually

The 31st Meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) was held virtually from January 12-21, 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic. During the meeting, various sectoral committees discussed and considered their specific areas for making appropriate recommendations to the 31st Meeting of RPC. It is pertinent to mention that this year, the format of the meeting was changed and aligned as per virtual requirement, thus, meeting prolonged to two weeks.

The meeting was attended by the delegations from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. The Representatives of the Turkish Cypriot State and the Turkic Council attended the Meeting in the capacity of Observer. The delegation from ECO Secretariat headed by Secretary General also participated in the



event. The Representatives of ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions and Affiliated Bodies also took part in the Meeting. President ECOSF Prof. Manzoor H. Soomro headed the delegation of ECOSF in the meeting.

H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour ECO Secretary General, while welcoming the participants highlighted that this important ECO event convened annually to review the past activities of the organization, as well as consider and evolve some fresh programs and projects to be executed from ECO's platform for continuing the developmental process in our region. He underscored that the COVID crunch, like most parts of the world, has not spared our region, hampering regular developmental activities which were perceived to be made in consideration of the ECO Work Program and Calendar of Events for 2020 endorsed by the 30th Meeting of RPC.

The Secretary General further informed that one of the organization's experiences in the time of crisis was resorting to the virtual modes of working which proved to be efficient, cost-effective and fast-track. In the given context he underlined that the Secretariat conducted several ECO meetings virtually in the pursuit of organization's goals as per ECO Vision 2025 that included ministerial and High Level Working Group meetings. Holding the 31st meeting of RPC online is a continuation of such virtual approach which has been globally adopted in the aftermath of the pandemic, he added.



As per ECO's rules and procedures, the Chair of ECO Council of Ministers (COM) and the host of the meeting Republic of Turkey was elected to chair the RPC meeting. Mr. Fatih ÜNLÜ, Director General of the Strategy and Budget of the Presidency of Turkey then led and chaired the Meeting. Mr. Fatih ÜNLÜ, expressing gratitude for the confidence bestowed upon him by the participating Member States, appreciated the ECO Secretariat for excellent preparation of this virtual meeting of RPC. He reiterated the importance that the Republic of Turkey attaches for expanded and deepened relations amongst the member countries in the larger interest of the region. He also highlighted the importance of cooperation and acting in unison for attaining synergies and better coping with the emerging regional and global challenges.

The Heads of delegations of the ECO Member States delivered their statements in alphabetical order outlining their countries' policies and views on the programmes and activities of the Organization. They also highlighted the progress made on the implementation of the decisions taken during the 30th Meeting of the RPC. The Heads of delegations of the ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions and Affiliated Bodies presented their statements/reports highlighting their activities and progress made since last RPC's meeting.

Prof. Soomro made the statement of ECOSF in the meeting. In his statement, he said that the year 2020 has been extremely challenging for the entire world. The COVID-19 has been a tough test and has not raised the expectations in science but emphasized the fact of stronger collaboration & cooperation among nations to develop scientific solutions towards this global challenge. He shared that ECOSF has conducted the impact assessment, and hosted several virtual events by engaging scientists, researchers and policy experts towards health sciences and practices among the scientists and research community of the ECO region to respond to COVID-19. Pandemic has transformed entire businesses around the world. Thus, during the pandemic year, we had to adopt digital technologies to keep pace with moving world and organized numerous strategic events virtually..



He further shared that ECOSF encouraged colleagues in ECO member countries to contribute to an international book entitled; "Communicating Science- A Global Perspective" published by the Australian National University (ANU) Press in 2020. Colleagues from Iran and Turkey contributed chapters on science communication in their countries whereas; the ECOSF team contributed the chapter on science communication in Pakistan.

Prof. Soomro told that the Foundation in 2020 joined hands with Beijing Technology and Business University (BTBU) and launched the The Joint Center is funded by the Government of China. "BTBU-ECOSF Joint Training Center on Scientific, Technological and Economic Cooperation" under the Belt and Road Initiative. Under the initiative, we organized the first virtual training on "Management and Development of Special Economic Zones" in December 2020. Objective of this training was to build the capacity of professionals of the ECO region and beyond on significance of special economic zones especially in the context of industrial development and sustainable economic growth. Over 150 participants from all ECO countries and a good number of Chinese participants benefitted from this training. It is pertinent to mention that this training served as a strategic resource for the ECO member countries in developing effective and adequate policies for infrastructure development pertaining to the economic zones.

President ECOSF further told that the Foundation has been working very closely with China Association of Science and Technology- CAST since 2017 and has been facilitating young students and teachers/coordinators/officials from Member Countries in the Belt and Road programmes. He concluded that ECOSF is making all possible efforts to promote science, technology, innovation and scientific education activities in the region with the collaboration and support of International Organizations.

At the end, the Council appreciated and thanked the ECO Secretary General and his team for making necessary arrangements for successful holding the online meeting of the RPC and preparation of relevant documents. The Council concluded the meeting with a vote of thanks to the Chair for managing the meeting in a proactive, smooth and efficient manner. The Council also acknowledged and thanked the Chairpersons of various Sectoral Committees for successfully conducting their tasks.

**Consultative Meeting of ECO Specialized Agencies on "The Role of Culture, Education and Science in Sustainable Development" held**

A Consultation Meeting of the ECO Specialized Agencies on "The Role of Culture, Education and Science in Sustainable Development" was virtually held on 18 January 2021. Presidents of all three Specialized Agencies, i.e., ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) Prof. Manzoor Hussain Soomro, ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) Prof. Sarvar Bakhti and ECO Educational Institute (ECOEI) Prof. M. Akif Kireççi attended the meeting. Deputy Secretary General of ECO for the International Relations Section Dr. Hüseyin Avni Bıçaklı and ECO Science Foundation President-designate also participated in the meeting.



The meeting was opened by the Deputy Secretary General of ECO. He welcomed the participants and appreciated the initiative of holding joint meeting. He also said that Specialized Agencies have a strong role to implement goals and objectives enshrined in ECO's Treaty of Izmir and contribute significantly in socio-economic development of the region. The activities of the specialized agencies are crucially important for our region's sustainable economic growth and meeting the challenges of the modern era. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the regional and global socio-economic trends. It has also enhanced the importance of already well recognized need for mutual cooperation and integrated approach in different fields in order to meet the challenges of the existing situation and post COVID-19 era.

President ECOSF Prof. Soomro, in his remarks, said that all three agencies are important organs of ECO tasked to promote and support activities in the fields of education, science and culture in the member countries. He further shared that ECOSF pursues the goal of promoting research and technological development for sustainable development and economic growth in the ECO region through development of Human Resource capacity for science, technology and innovation as well as science education, strengthening Institutional Capacity, Scientific, Technological and Research Collaboration and Cooperation among its member states and the developed world and exchange/dissemination of Information on S&T Research and Development through workshops, conferences and meetings etc. He emphasized that all three agencies have to work very closely together because science and education go hand in hand and culture plays a major role how we go about different scientific concepts. Thus, the effective partnership is critical to make necessary progress and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with the ECO Vision 2025.



Prof. Bakhti, President of ECI said that many years ago, a number of neighboring countries joined together to help each other in achieving progress and development and economic development was the foremost concern of that time; thus, ECO was established. He further said that it is a well-known fact that cultural factors play a key role in sustainable development of a region, so planning for sustainable development should be based on regional culture. But the important point is that if we

believe in a holistic integrative concept of sustainable development, all cultural, educational and scientific aspects of development need to be adequately taken into account, therefore, development could be considered a set of organized interrelated activities and the specialized agencies of the ECO are able to address all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Prof. Kirecci, President ECOEI said that although they coordinate with ECOSF and ECI on a regular basis but this meeting marks their solidarity. There are several activities in which ECOEI would be glad to receive ECOSF and ECI's input. With ECI, ECOEI may work on the activities that aim at promoting education of our common heritage. In ECOEI's activities on vocational training, arts and crafts of the ECO region could be included. Similarly, ECOSF's input would also be welcomed. The economic development rests on a capable, skillful and a highly educated society, he added. He highlighted that every dollar invested in education contributes fifteen-fold in economy. Therefore, ECO Educational Institute is firmly committed to support advancement of education in Member States, through supporting experts, educators, institutions and students.



During the meeting, various programmes and initiative of respective agencies were discussed and the following was agreed upon with consensus.

- News coverage of the activities of the specialized agencies by each other on their website and pages on social media
- Joint action plan by the ECO specialized agencies.
- Regular meetings of Presidents of the ECO specialized agencies.

**President ECOSF as Chief Guest attended the International Conference on Smart Plant Protection**

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture, Multan Pakistan organized a virtual International Conference on Smart Plant Protection on 27-28 January 2021. President ECOSF Prof. Manzoor H. Soomro participated as the Chief Guest in the concluding ceremony and highlighted the significance of plant protection and the role of technology in crop management and pest surveillance and management for ensuring global food security.

The Conference provided insights into innovations and advances in Plant Protection, aiming to protect the plant resources from the invasion and infestation of insect pests, plant pathogens and weeds. The conference also provided a collection of innovative ideas and recent research undertaken by scholars, academia and entrepreneurs world over.



Prof. Soomro in his remarks highlighted that ECOSF gives due importance to food security, as it is one of the priority areas of research by the Foundation. He underscored that the smart crop protection is critical to secure and maintain crop productivity. Pesticide-dominated control strategies are threatened by the widespread evolution of resistance in many major crop pests. Thus, there is an urgent need for innovation in crop protection. New gadgets equipped with artificial intelligence and robotics including drone technology can be used in this field. He hoped that the outcome of this important international conference would benefit the agricultural scientists, researchers and farmers to better plan and ensure food security.

### ECOSF participates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Integrated STEM Leadership Summit in Asia

2<sup>nd</sup> Integrated STEM Leadership Summit in Asia was held virtually on 21-22 January 2021. The theme of the Summit was “Reimagining Integrated STEM Education: Amplifying Agility and Transformational Collaboration for a Post-Pandemic Asia”. It was organized by STEM Leadership Alliance, UNILAB Foundation, Center for Integrated STEM Education (CISTEM), Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL) and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

The Summit brought together the STEM leaders, educators, students, young scientists, policy makers and other persons/institutes working to promote STEM education, from all over the world. ECOSF being among the main organizations promoting STEM education in Central and West Asia, was invited to participate. Thus President ECOSF Prof. Manzoor H. Soomro and Assistant Director Programmes Mr. Ghulam Abbas participated in the Summit.

Distinguished speakers from government, academia, industry and the STEM community such as Jeff Weld from USA; Barbara Morgan a retired NASA astronaut; Dr. Carol O'Donnell Director Smithsonian Science Education Center, Washington DC USA; Peter Charles Taylor; Kumano Yoshisuke from Japan; Dr. Tang Wee Teo from Singapore, Dr. Daniel Rouan from France, Dr. Pornpun Waitayangkoon from Thailand and many others facilitated discussions and collaboration on various topics related to research, initiatives, curriculum models, case studies, education frameworks were discussed throughout the Summit.

The Summit provided a discussion space to STEM thought-leaders, innovators, and champions who synergized to explore opportunities for strengthening the STEM talent pipeline through new education technologies and creative approaches to building foundational STEM skills, developing high quality, guided STEM pathways for learners and deepening industry partnerships to promote STEM careers and prepare today's learners in the demands of the workforce.

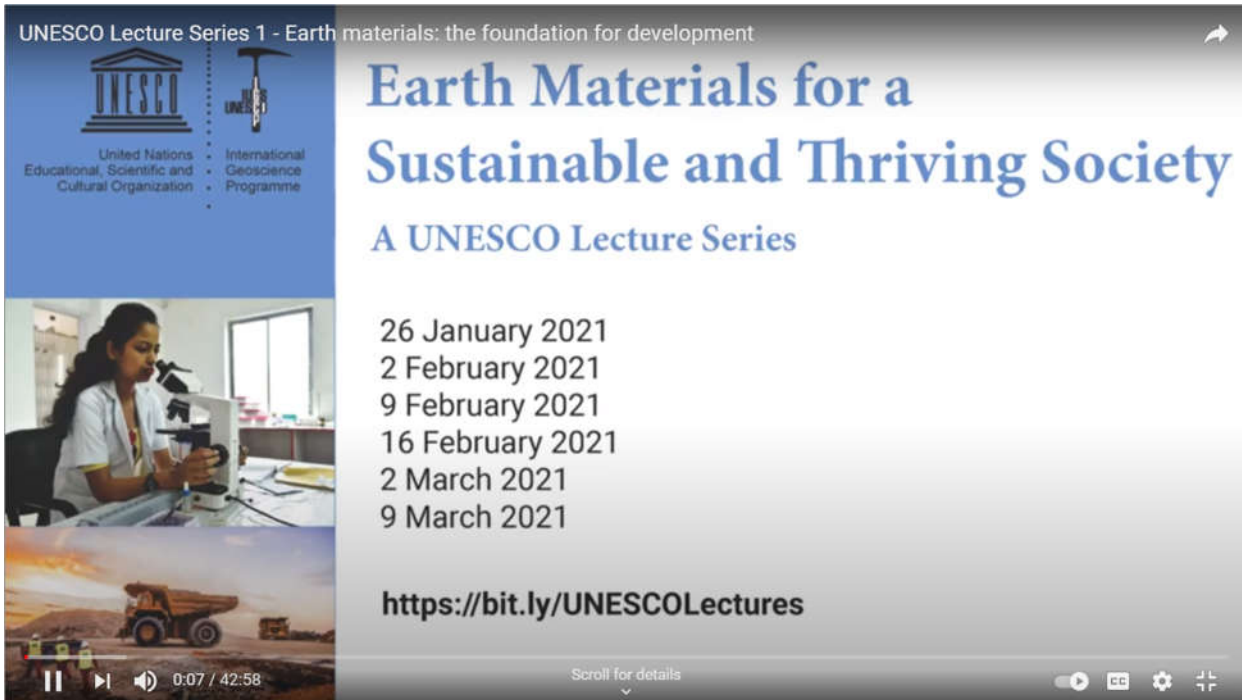
During the summit, the cross-sectoral dialogues and collaborations on Integrated STEM Education were also discussed.

### UNESCO Lecture on Earth Materials for a Sustainable and Thriving Society attended by President ECOSF

UNESCO has planned a series of lectures to highlight the importance of earth materials in the world. The first lecture on Earth Materials for a Sustainable and Thriving Society with the theme; “Earth materials: the foundation for development” was held virtually on 26 January 2021. It was attended by large number of earth scientists, researchers, academia and the students. Prof. Manzoor H. Soomro, President ECOSF also attended the first lecture.

The speakers of the lecture were **Dr Larry Meinert**, Meinert Consulting LLC, Delaware, USA and **Dr Nellie Mutemeri**, Mining Practice Lead, Mutemeri Consulting and Associate Professor, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. They discussed about minerals and other earth materials as key components in the development of a sustainable global society, providing essential raw materials for various technologies and economic growth, while respecting the natural world.

This lecture, designed for a global audience, provided diverse perspectives on earth materials and their role in society. Leading natural scientists, social scientists, and educators looked at how earth materials are critical to a sustainable future and how the minerals sector, adhering to best practices, can contribute to society in a socially and environmentally positive way. Future lectures can be joined by anyone interested using the link in above poster.



After the lecture, President ECOSF held a networking meeting with Prof. David Kaplan of International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, Cape Town South Africa, who concluded the discussion after the lecture. The two briefly introduced each other’s organizations and appreciated the first lecture of the series on Earth Materials by UNESCO’s Geosciences programme. Potential collaboration was also discussed during the meeting. The lectures can be joined in through the link in the poster above [<https://bit.ly/UNESCOlectures>].

**ECOSF participated in a virtual event by International Science Council on COVID-19 - From Recovery to Sustainability**

The International Science Council (ISC) organized an online event on January 25-26, 2020 on “COVID-19 – From Recovery to Sustainability and pathways to a post-COVID World”. The purpose of organizing this event was to underline the significant role of science for recovering for recovering better from the COVID-19 crisis. To address this challenge, ISC partnered with the United Nations to develop the Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery. This roadmap provides a framework for leveraging the power of science in support of a better socio-economic recovery and a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future.

On behalf of ECOSF, its President Prof. Dr. Manzoor Hussain Soomro and Engr. Khalil Raza, Scientific Officer participated in the event.

**Ms. Alison Meston** the ISC Communications Director moderated the session. While, **Dr. Steven Hoffman** Scientific Director, Institute of Population & Public Health, Canadian Institutes of Health Research was the speaker during the first session held on January 25, 2020 who led the development of the UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery.



Dr. Hoffman emphasized that the complex challenges and opportunities associated with the COVID-19 recovery process require robust research and science ecosystems that are equipped to investigate and help manage interdependencies.

He presented five science strategies for better recovery:

**Data infrastructure** for organizations, policies, processes, systems and technologies involved in the collection, storage, management, oversight, distribution and use of data.

**Implementation of science** to the study of methods and strategies to promote the uptake of effective interventions into practices, programs and policies.

**Rapid learning systems** for using the best available evidence and local data to inform decisions and commit to learn from their experiences as quickly as possible so as to enable continuous improvements and to contribute to the global evidence base.

**Knowledge mobilization** to promote the use of research evidence to inform choices and generate positive impacts.

**Science of science** to recognize as to how research is funded, practiced and evaluated, and how research cultures and systems can be made more efficient, open, inclusive and impactful.

### Bouncing Forward Sustainably: Pathways to a post-COVID world

On January 26, 2020, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the International Science Council (ISC), brought together experts from all over the world through the IIASA-ISC Consultative Science Platform “Bouncing Forward Sustainably: Pathways to a post-COVID world”.

This consultative science platform serves as a global hub for consultation, deliberation, and collaboration among scientists, policymakers, and representatives from civil society around four key interconnected themes: Governance for Sustainability, Strengthening Science Systems, Resilient Food Systems, and Sustainable Energy.

The virtual event presented a synthesis of the four thematic reports produced as part of the IIASA–ISC Consultative Science Platform and presented eight recommendations that have the potential to enable systemic transformations and structural changes. Operationalizing these recommendations would facilitate a more sustainable and resilient future for humanity, as the world recovers from COVID-19.

### ECOSF participated in the E-Conference on Education Policy 2021

The University of Education in Lahore- Pakistan organized a four-day E-Conference on Education Policy 2021 from 19-22 January 2021. The University of Education being one of the unique institutes of teacher education in the country is at frontline to help ministry in formulating a comprehensive policy document with a major focus on national cohesion and harmony across religious



and ethnic divides which is essential for the context of Pakistan. The objective of this conference was to highlight and generate a meaningful debate on the prospects and challenges of Education Policy 2021.

Eminent educationists from all over Pakistan representing various universities participated in the conference as keynote speakers. On behalf of ECOSF, its President Prof. Dr. Manzoor Hussain Soomro who has been promoting Inquiry Based Science Education pedagogy for teachers in Pakistan over last decade, participated in the conference. Experts underscored that firm and coherent education policy is direly needed in the country which can be the bedrock for taking innovative steps in the system. There was largely a consensus among the experts that the education should be inclusive, equitable and with a focus on lifelong learning.

In his opening remarks, the Punjab Higher Education Commission Chairman Dr. Fazal Ahmad Khalid underlined that the Education Policy 2021 should be on how to bring out of school children in the schools, the establishment of new educational institutions, development of infrastructure, and training of teachers and quality education along with quantity.

Prof. Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha, Vice-Chancellor University of Education Lahore emphasized that the education plays the most vital role in the social and economic development for any nation. He proposed to formulate a vibrant education policy while keeping in view our existing strengths, competitiveness and our future aspirations. There must be one door admission policy for all children to observe Right to Education Act in the country with equitable opportunities to address these groups of out of school children.

### President ECOSF visits the Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute

On January 28, 2021, President ECOSF Prof. Dr. Manzoor Hussain Soomro visited the Pak-Austria Fachhochschule: Institute of Applied Science and Technology (PAF IAST) which is located in Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa about 60 KMs from Islamabad in PaKISTAN. Prof. Dr. Nasir Khan, the Project Director of the Institute warmly welcomed Prof. Soomro and presented a detailed overview, vision and objectives of the PAF-IAST.

Prof. Nasir Khan shared that this institute is a collaborative public sector venture in partnership with premier Austrian and Chinese universities for academic excellence, technology transfer, and for developing a state-of-the-art technology park where new products for commercial use will be developed. The



mission of this institute is to generate a pool of quality human resource in order to enhance the prosperity of Pakistan through developing a knowledge economy. It is important to mention that this Institute is the brainchild of Prof. Atta-ur-Rahman *FRS, NI, HI, SI, TI* Former Federal Minister and former Chairman of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, who currently serves as the Chairman of Prime Minister's Task Force on Science and Technology as well as the Chairman Advisory Board of this institute.





Prof. Khan proudly shared that institute has a degree awarding charter its entire faculty is adequately trained at international universities with effective teaching and research methodologies, which will increasingly help students in broadening their academic excellence. He also shared that the students will get chance to study their last year degree program at international partner universities.

Later Prof. Soomro was shown around the campus, which is purpose-built and fully equipped with facilities, such as smart class rooms, high-tech labs, library, each faculty block has its own auditorium, and campus WiFi.



**ECOSF participated in the policy dialogue on Data for the Climate and SDGs organized by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)**

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) as part of its Global Policy Dialogue Series organized the virtual dialogue on Data for the Climate and SDGs on January 21, 2021. The dialogue underscored the need to leverage and innovate data collection, data use and interdisciplinary analytical approaches to enable an evidence-based and risk-informed approach to decision-making. On behalf of ECOSF, President Prof. Dr. Manzoor Hussain Soomro and Engr. Khalil Raza participated in the event.

The dialogue was held in the form of two sessions; one session focused on ensuring equality, inclusive growth and access to opportunities while the second session on highlighted the role of effective use of data and statistics to support the climate and SDG Agenda.



Experts emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new sense of urgency to the need for transformative change to strengthen public institutions, address financing gaps and support the development dilemmas of the most vulnerable countries. Experts further deliberated that the pandemic has highlighted long known but ill-addressed systemic flaws in the social contract at global and national levels, with the social and economic impacts hitting along existing fault lines of inequality and inequity based on gender, racial, ethnic, ageist and economic discrimination, among others.

**ECOSF Participated Indus Cultural Forum (ICF) Board of Governors (BoG) Meeting on 13 January 2021**

Indus Cultural Forum Pakistan held its virtual meeting of the Board of Governors (BoG) on 13 January 2021. Prof. Manzoor Hussain Soomro attended the meeting as the Member of ICF BOG. The purpose of organizing this meeting was to deliberate on the agenda program of upcoming Mother Language Literature Festival 2021. Owing to the COVID-19 situation, the BoG decided to organize this event using hybrid mode with virtual and offline arrangements. BoG endorsed the proposal by Prof. Soomro to organize an exclusive session on the “Science of Pandemic in the response to COVID-19 during the festival, which will highlight the significance of robust science systems to fight against the pandemic in various local languages.