Educational Justice and Indigenous Peoples

An estimated 370 million Indigenous people live across 90 countries and represent around 5,000 different cultures. Despite constituting only 5 per cent of the world’s population, they make up 15 per cent of people living in poverty and 1/3 of people living in extreme poverty. They are also considered one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the world. Many countries now have policies and laws to protect Indigenous peoples, eliminate institutional barriers and inequalities, redress injustices they face, and improve their conditions, including and especially through education. However, research and international reports show that there is little progress made in achieving any of these objectives, and education is one of the stumbling blocks. This presentation will rely on my research, lived and professional experiences in and with Indigenous communities across Asia-Pacific and beyond. In line with other work on Indigenous education and rights, my research showed that education (even if perceived as of high quality by dominant groups) rarely helps Indigenous groups to meet their community and individual needs. Changes within education systems have been superficial and focused on addressing Indigenous cultural ‘disadvantage’ and ‘difference’ at the neglect of structural and substantive transformations required to support Indigenous development. In this presentation, I will draw on a comprehensive framework of justice that includes distributive, epistemic, relational, and transitional/historical justice aspects to propose alternatives that can support Indigenous peoples’ development. They are 1/ transformation of the existing education systems (Indigenisation of education) and 2/ development of a new, a parallel education system grounded in Indigenous knowledges, values, norms, cultures, languages, and other aspects of Indigeneity. Together, they can challenge the hegemony of dominant ethnic groups, support transitional justice and reconciliation processes, and develop a system that is genuinely inclusive of Indigenous (and other minority) learners and communities as well as of diversity of knowledges and ways of knowing and being.

Dr Yulia Nesterova
University of Glasgow

Dr Yulia Nesterova is a research associate in education and international development in the GCRF Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SHLC) and the School of Education at the University of Glasgow. At SHLC, Yulia is working with partners in seven countries across Africa and Asia to investigate educational inequalities and opportunities across urban areas. She is also leading a British Academy-funded project on community-driven and Indigenous approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation through education. Before joining Glasgow, Yulia was with UNESCO MGIEP and UNESCO Asia-Pacific working on peacebuilding, sustainable development, and youth engagement.