Research
Paper

Reflecting language diversity in children's schooling: moving from 'Why multilingual education' to 'How?'

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List of key terms

Basic education	The range of educational activities taking place in various settings that aim to meet basic learning needs. According to the International Standard Classification of Education ([ISCED](#)), basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). In developing countries in particular, basic education often includes also pre-primary education and/or adult literacy programs.
Education For All (EFA)	The Education for All movement took off at the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. Since then, the international community has taken up a set of commitments to providing quality basic education for all children, youth and adults by 2015.
First language	The language which people use most frequently in their home lives.
Fragility	A fragile state is a low income country characterised by weak state capacity and/or weak state legitimacy.
Instruction/language of instruction	The main language used to conduct most or all teaching and learning activities in education. This may be determined by an official policy, or it may be the language chosen by educators in response to perceived demand.
Lingua franca	A language regularly used for communication between communities (often a second language for all)
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve eight international development goals by the year 2015. Goal 2 is to achieve universal primary education, with the commitment that by 2015 all children can complete a full course of primary schooling. Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women, with the target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels by 2015.
Mother tongue	The main language used constantly from birth to interact and communicate with a child by their carers, family, friends and community. (If more than one language is constantly used in this way throughout childhood, a child can be considered bilingual.)
Mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE)	Learner-centred, active basic education which starts in the mother tongue and gradually introduces one or more other languages in a structured manner, linked to children's existing understanding in their first language or mother tongue. Teaching predominantly in the mother tongue for at least six years, alongside the development of other languages, is required for this approach to deliver high quality learning outcomes.

Barriers to making school systems multilingual: the need for more learning

People in schools, families and governments in many countries know that the way language is handled in basic education is not working. They know that many children learn very little in school, and that one of the main reasons for achieving poorly or dropping out is not being able to understand or use the language of teaching and examinations.

Educators often know that this effect is most dramatic in settings of poverty and poor teaching quality. Children in these settings know this best of all, struggling through hours of classes trying to make a torrent of unfamiliar words make sense - or realising in an exam that they will not pass because they do not understand many of the questions. Some never go to school, knowing that their language and identity will not be welcome. These issues are estimated to affect 221 million school aged children worldwide (Dutcher, 2004).

This research and learning project started as a way to learn more about the chances for pilot mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE) projects to become scaled up within the school systems in which they were operating. Each project already had an advocacy and scale-up strategy attached to it, but we wanted to do more to find out whether that strategy was strong enough, and what could be done to improve it.

Why did we want to do this with multilingual education projects, rather than any other type of education project? We wanted to look into whether there were any particular issues associated with scaling up multilingual education that were distinctive or more challenging than other types of education change programme. This was because, although the evidence is increasingly being accepted that children who do not speak dominant languages at home need multilingual education, progress towards offering multilingual education to the children who need it has been slow, particularly outside Central and South America.

Where to focus investigations

In East and South Asia, where Save the Children was conducting its most well developed MTBMLE work, political concerns were a key factor in stalling progress on multilingual education. Also, the fact that school systems were often highly bureaucratic meant that any major change was challenging, particularly change requiring diverse approaches according to local conditions – such as teaching in different languages in different areas. Although several pilot projects were succeeding, obtaining strong government support to take them to a larger scale was rare, particularly in the poorest and most ethnically divided settings.

However, in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, government-led initiatives had taken on multilingual education at a relatively large scale for tribal children. It seemed worth asking what factors had enabled this work in India, and what factors needed to be taken into account in other contexts, if multilingual education was to be scaled up successfully elsewhere.

A group of education NGO workers hoped that capturing some possible answers to these questions would be useful for others involved in making it easier for children to understand the language in which they were being taught. We wanted to capture learning from contexts with enough diversity to allow us to capture any common challenges or solutions. We also wanted to focus on settings that appeared to have large and complex barriers towards the scaling up of multilingual education.

As well as learning from attempts to scale up multilingual education in such contexts, we wanted to see if we could test out strategies to improve the scale up of multilingual education in response to our investigation. Would it help the efficacy of our attempts to scale up multilingual education to add extra research, reflection and analysis, and take an action research approach to strengthening scale up strategies? We wanted to see if such an approach would be useful to add to initiatives aiming to overcome the large challenges faced in institutionalising multilingual education.

Research project parameters

CfBT Education Trust offered to support an action research project to support such a process. One of the key outcomes of the project was to be a set of guidance for others interested in scaling up and institutionalising multilingual education within school systems which did not currently support it.

The parameters of the project were that it should produce learning and guidance relevant to both low- and middle-income countries grappling with the need for children to develop multiple languages, despite living in settings where dominant languages were not in use in everyday life. Learning should be produced about efforts to promote good quality multilingual education which respected communities' rights to maintaining and developing their own cultural identities and languages through education, at the same time as promoting strong skills across the curriculum and in 'prestige languages' considered important for taking up economic and social opportunities. The learning needed to be done on the basis of a small budget and without setting up new project work.

It was decided to focus on two well-developed multilingual education projects run by Save the Children with local partners which met all these criteria, in Vietnam and Bangladesh. We would use a process of research and reflection to come up with strategies to strengthen the chances of institutionalising elements of these projects into their surrounding education systems. This would take just over one year, to enable us to capture challenges and see how attempts to address them played out within wider change processes.

As well as assessing information from the projects and the contexts in which they operate, we would use detailed learning from the government-led projects in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa to broaden the range of issues and strategies available to us. The context in which the India programmes were working had enough common and different features with the Vietnam and Bangladesh programmes to allow us to try to draw out some information on which challenges to institutionalising multilingual education might be common among several contexts, and which might be linked to certain features of the education system and country background.

We knew that looking only at these three contexts would not allow us to make universal conclusions about which issues commonly affect progress towards institutionalising multilingual education. However, we hoped that enough in-depth learning would come from this initiative to provide some genuinely useful insights that would not be possible from a larger-scale comparative study.

The three programmes are piloting the following components which, if replicated, would make it easier for children to learn in a language they understand and acquire second language:

- Curriculum adaptation models to translate the national curriculum into teaching based in local culture and language – all three countries
- Bilingual team teaching lesson planning tools and training materials (qualified teachers working with bilingual local teaching assistants) – Vietnam
- Tracking and assessment tools for teachers to monitor children's performance - Vietnam
- Bilingual preschool teacher training model for untrained teachers – Bangladesh
- Indigenous language committees to review and endorse newly scripted local languages - Bangladesh
- Bilingual primary school teacher training materials for existing teachers – India
- Local-language alphabet charts, reading and learning materials – Bangladesh and India

The main methodology of the research was qualitative. Monitoring systems for all the projects were already in place, showing how many schools and children were involved, what activities were under way, and what progress children were making. The research team wanted to identify which areas of the work required the strongest evidence to overcome objections to scale up, and to find out whether new strategies could be effective in dealing with challenges.

Stage 1: local stakeholder research

The initial research plan was to conduct two cycles of action research at the local level within each project, and to conduct investigations in India to draw in relevant learning to feed into action plans in Vietnam and Bangladesh. To identify who should be the key focus of the action developed, we listed key stakeholders in local education systems as the main actors who would be supported to take additional actions to strengthen the institutionalisation of multilingual education in their school systems. A small amount of funding would be available to support these stakeholders to take forward the actions they had identified as necessary.

The project's key 'action group' was identified as education stakeholders who had already had exposure to multilingual education through involvement in the projects and who were likely to be enthusiastic about taking forward further change (see table 1 below). These included teachers and teaching assistants who were teaching in mother tongue and bilingually, teachers and head teachers who could not speak children's mother tongue but were committed to multilingual education, local education officials, parents and potentially children themselves. These people would be not be large in number as the pilot projects were fairly small, but would have the capacity to work together to identify ways to make the changes they were involved in more sustainable and easier to be scaled up.

This group of potential 'action researchers' also included the research team, who had the scope to promote the institutionalisation of multilingual education in a different sphere by making improvements to the design and execution of programme and advocacy initiatives. The research team would also act as supporters to the actions taken by local education stakeholders.

The research team	
Research leader	Helen Pinnock
International consultant with in-depth experience of India programmes	Pamela Mackenzie
Programme manager Bangladesh	Matiur Rahman
Project manager Bangladesh	Meherun Nahar
Head of partner NGO Bangladesh, Zabarang Kalyang Samity	Mathura Tripura
Programme manager Vietnam	Dinh Phuong Thao and Nguyen Thi Bich
Project officers Vietnam	To To Tam and Thuy Luong Song
Save the Children research and evaluation expert	Elizabeth Pearce
Save the Children multilingual education expert	Terry Durnnian

Table 1. Project 'Action Group'

Type of stakeholder	Background	Number interviewed/took part in discussions
Children in bilingual preschool or early primary education	Vietnam: 4 communes in Quang Ninh Province, 3 communes in Dien Bien province, 4 ethnic minority groups;	54 Vietnam
	Bangladesh: pilot project of 60 community preschools for 3 ethnic minority groups in Khachagrari, Chittagong Hill Tracts	62 Bangladesh
Parents of children in pilot bilingual classes	4 ethnic minority groups Vietnam;	16 Vietnam
	3 ethnic minority groups Bangladesh	22 Bangladesh
Government teacher	In pilot preschools and primary schools	8
	In non pilot primary schools	22
Bilingual teaching assistant (Vietnam) /community preschool teacher (Bangladesh)	Vietnam: 4 ethnic minority groups; completed grade 9 education	12
	Bangladesh: 3 ethnic minority groups; completed grade 6 education	18
Head teacher	Vietnam: pre-primary, pilot schools	9
	Bangladesh: primary, non pilot schools	11
Local government official	Vietnam: pilot communes	2
	Bangladesh: subdistrict education officers	9
Local NGO staff	Bangladesh: Zabarang Kalyang Samity	4
Mid level government official	Tien Yien District, Vietnam	1
	Bangladesh: Hill District Council	1
Mid level education official	Muong Cha and Tien Yen Districts, Vietnam	6
	Bangladesh: pilot district Education Officer	1
National/State level opinion former or official	India: Ministry of Education and Indigenous Affairs staff in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa	5

Another key group of education stakeholders was identified as those who were involved in multilingual education but did not have strong enough commitments to promoting it to be taking specific supportive actions. These key informants were vital to providing insights into why progress towards scale up was running into problems, and what types of solutions would or would not be appropriate in the context. They ranged from parents, and teachers not involved in the programme, to national and provincial level officials involved with decision making around whether to take on pilot or replication initiatives in multilingual education.

Access to these individuals was based on existing relationships with members of the research team and pilot project teams. Numbers were also not large, but emphasis was placed on getting input from people who were close to decision making which directly affected the success of attempts to scale up multilingual education, from local to national levels. National officials' input was not formally sought in Bangladesh and Vietnam, as most of them would not have been in the position of being able to go on record with their views. However, knowledge gained from research team interactions with high level influential officials in both countries was taken into account.

A further group of key informants included education actors in India involved in the Andhra Pradesh and Orissa programmes, at programme and state levels.

Initial research

The first stage of research involved capturing the opinions and concerns of local stakeholders in the bilingual education pilots around mother tongue based bilingual education. In summer 2009, interviews and focus group discussions were arranged with the range of education actors and informants identified.   They were asked about their experiences of MTBMLE work so far and what they thought about the prospects for bilingual or multilingual education being adopted on a larger scale in the future in their context. Group sizes ranged from three to four local education officials, to ten to fifteen parents or children. Teachers were interviewed individually and in small groups. Approximately five percent of teachers and children in the Bangladesh project were interviewed, and half of teachers and children in the (much smaller) Vietnam project were interviewed.

 At the same time classroom observations were made to establish that MTBMLE approaches were in fact being used in pilot schools, and case studies of each project intervention were produced to capture the nature and achievements of the pilot projects.

Barriers to institutionalising MTBMLE raised by local stakeholders

Supporting and developing teachers

Local education managers, teachers and parents raised several common issues about the long term future for MTBMLE in their contexts. Teachers and teaching assistants perceived many common challenges with other educational change initiatives, such as difficulties in retaining trained teachers and teaching assistants; challenges with getting teacher allocation right based on language; basic levels of teacher training not being consistently available in the public education system; and co-ordination between different departments of government to allow changes to go ahead..

Teacher supply was another major issue raised by local teachers and officials. Finding teachers or local assistants with the right language skills and keeping and training them was recognised as a major barrier. In Vietnam in particular, where teachers in rural areas are moved every two years, training in bilingual education in a particular local language was likely to be wasted. Retaining minority teaching assistants or preschool teachers was a major concern in Vietnam and Bangladesh, as salaries were perceived as low and assistantship/NGO teacher status did not offer a clear route into teaching.

Gaining support at high and low levels

Specific 'extra' challenges related to the political dimensions of language were also affecting progress; such as changes to curricula to reflect minority children's religion. In one example, a textbook which replaced Ramadan with the local major religious holiday was banned and all related work stopped once a particular group of local officials became aware of it, despite its having been approved by other officials.

In the most politically sensitive project area in Vietnam, pilot MTBMLE work has been suspended several times because the provincial education authorities wanted exceptional written permission from the Ministry of Education to support the work. Whenever personnel at central level changed and questioned the work, new permissions had to be sought. Compared with Quang Ninh, where work was able to continue because of the strong long-term relationship between the provincial education authorities and Save the Children, this issue pointed out the key learning point that if a new bilingual education initiative is rolled out in politically sensitive locations that do not have strong prior involvement with the issue or with bilingual education actors, very strong messages in support of the initiative from the political centre are required.

Learning was also that when hiatuses of this nature occur, a dedicated link person or agency between the centre and the site of desired action is needed to get things moving again. Save the Children was able to secure the required written permissions, after organising several meetings and workshops to convince new leadership of the need for the programmes.

In all settings a multiplicity of authorities involved in delivering and overseeing education resulted in confusion about who should approve changed practice and who is accountable for delivery, with results that one body would block work approved by another.

Parents interviewed were all happy for their children to learn in their first language, because they appeared to understand that children would do better in understanding and in second language. However, it was recognised that parents without exposure to similar projects may not be as confident with any new MTBMLE work.

Reflection on key issues affecting institutionalisation

Discussing the concerns captured from stakeholders and the experience so far of blocks to progress highlighted several common challenges with MTBMLE institutionalisation. These tended to operate together, affecting middle level education decision makers most significantly. They can be summarised as follows:

- National and mid-levels officials' opposition to reducing national/dominant culture and language in education (Bangladesh particularly)
- Local officials' concern at taking on change not fully approved by central level (Vietnam particularly)
- Demand for MTBMLE only clear for those who work with children and/or schools directly – no pressure from the top of the education system
- Basic conditions for quality teaching not in place, undermining success of efforts to introduce multiple languages (India especially)
- Decision makers unclear why they should prioritise language among all the other education issues they are called on to engage with
- MTBMLE being seen as too complex and/or expensive to take on
- Major problems with supply of teachers with skills in local and dominant languages where needed (lack of recruitment, training and development opportunities; teacher posting decisions not based on language skills; high turnover of NGO teachers and teaching assistants due to short term status)
- The need for clearer definitions and practice and evidence standards for multicultural and bilingual education at regional level, between NGOs in particular.

A particularly valuable piece of learning was that components of MTBMLE can only be offered to government/education services for institutionalisation when they are receptive to that particular component, and in the right format for their capacity and context. For example, in Vietnam, political sensitivities around literacy in minority languages in programme areas are such that a focus on teacher training methods is far more likely to get traction. In India, teacher-training systems are very uncoordinated and, while efforts to engage with training issues are vital if MTBMLE in the target areas is not to be held back, it has previously only been feasible to get engagement from education authorities on materials development.

Having a range of pilot interventions available from which the most acceptable components can be offered for replication has been a useful strategy. These have included bilingual teaching assistants working with established teachers; lesson

adaptation and planning packs to help teachers plan multilingual lessons. Capturing these interventions in context-appropriate formats, such as training manuals, guidance notes or lesson formats depending on what is viewed as credible by key decision makers, was recognised as vital. Follow up action included producing professional and accessible packages of teaching and training tools which would be likely to be seen as an attractive addition to existing teaching resources by central curriculum and materials authorities.

A related piece of learning was that taking more time to prepare a strong set of interventions before 'going public' with them results in more successful and convincing change. In Vietnam, a year was taken as a 'pre-pilot' to work out teacher training and materials development approaches with a core group of teachers, trainers and teaching assistants, before it was rolled out in normal classroom practice. In India, once initial training and literacy materials were developed, government authorities took them and implemented them straight away on a relatively large scale out of enthusiasm, but ran into challenges because time for refining and improving had not been allowed. This took place in a context of very strong government ownership of the work.

In Bangladesh, data from stakeholders was clear that communities are in support of MTBMLE and the teachers currently involved in the programme have few concerns which affect the prospects for MTBMLE. The key barriers for change are the ways in which mainstream school teachers are trained and managed, and the way in which indigenous language and culture is handled and coordinated by NGOs and the various government actors involved in education. Therefore the focus for action needed to be on strengthening coordination and mutually agreed standards and accountability for MTBMLE.

This was acted on immediately after the workshop, as research team members supported the facilitation of a major conference in the Chittagong Hill Tracts shortly afterwards. At this conference, which was planned by Save the Children's MTBMLE programme as a means of encouraging greater commitment to common standards for indigenous children's education, many of the key objectives of the Bangladesh action plan were promoted and endorsed by conference participants – such as language materials councils, common standards for bilingual education, greater engagement with teaching colleges, and a greater role for the indigenous Hill Councils in approving and managing bilingual education.

Stage 2: changing the focus

On the basis of learning from this stage of the research, the research team assessed the relative power of stakeholders in education to affect whether or not MTBMLE was institutionalised (see Annex 4).

The research team had expected to find some of their own observations confirmed by the stakeholder research, and to find some new or insufficiently acknowledged issues that could be tackled by both local stakeholders and programme teams to strengthen the institutionalisation of multilingual education.

However, it became clear after the first round of data collection that in both Vietnam and Bangladesh, very limited agency was available to local education stakeholders to promote multilingual education. Although challenges were identified which local stakeholders were able to take action to address through this process, the biggest and most complex challenges, which posed the most threat to the continuation of the programmes and their scale up, involved decision making and attitudes at much higher levels. This picture chimed with experience in India. Major institutional and leadership challenges had caused the most problems with getting multilingual teaching off the ground at scale.

The local issues raised by stakeholders which did require action at the local level were also beyond the scope of teachers, parents and children to address. These issues either required action further up the education system or changes to the management and design of the pilot project. The research team decided that it would be most productive to focus more on these higher-level barriers to multilingual education, whilst pursuing action to respond to grassroots concerns within the pilot projects.

An action plan was created for each country for the core research team members to follow. These plans focussed on strengthening both the technical components of projects for replication, and on overcoming current institutional or political barriers to institutionalisation of MTBMLE. Each individual also developed a personal action and reflection plan to be monitored during the course of the research. This was reviewed and updated to form a second cycle of action and reflection in 2010.

Further local research

Vietnam

A phase of further reflection and action with teachers and teaching assistants was agreed in Vietnam. A more detailed study was undertaken by the programme team to capture the concerns and priorities of current and previous bilingual teaching assistants, with the aim of producing evidence for a clear policy on supporting local language speakers to enter and remain in teaching in minority areas.

This research was completed by Spring 2010. It revealed a great deal of disenchantment among teaching assistants with their new careers. While they enjoyed teaching and working with qualified teachers, poor pay and no foreseeable prospect of being able to enter teacher training meant that several left frequently when their husbands migrated for work, as the family had no key job to keep them in one place. The extra costs of including replacement teaching assistants in project training, and the challenges of ensuring that new teaching assistants were able to pick up progress, raised major questions that only ministerial action would be able to solve, by making it possible for minority people without college education to train as teachers.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the biggest issue for teachers and parents was that children from multilingual preschool were entering primary school without much Bangla. When primary school teachers were asked to talk about how children were doing in relation to children who had been to non-multilingual preschool, they focused on the lack of Bangla vocabulary that multilingual preschool children had. Parents were also concerned that their children were not doing as well in primary school as expected, because the children were not seen as having enough Bangla to cope in school with daily activities. Children confirmed they found school challenging. The initial intention of the Shishur Khamayatan Project (SKP) was to focus more on strengthening children's mother tongue as a foundation for learning, in line with international best practice.

The SKP team agreed to start introducing spoken Bangla six months earlier, at the start of Year 2, to give more time to gradually introduce more spoken Bangla before introducing written Bangla in the last six months of Year 2. While this would not give children enough Bangla to cope well with primary school entirely in Bangla, it would mitigate children's situation while work continued to influence the primary education sector to use children's mother tongue for teaching.

The raising of this issue also motivated Save the Children to commission further research into children's performance and school readiness in the SK pre-school.

The study found that children's competencies across the spectrum of pre-school and early childhood competencies and first and second language skills, including literacy,

were far stronger than those of children in pre-schools that used some mother tongue but used Bangla for main curriculum content.

On average, children learning in a MT [mother tongue] setting outperformed their non-MT peers by 10 percentage points on a general school readiness assessment and 5 percentage points on an assessment of concepts about print. Within the school readiness assessment, SKP children outperformed their peers in every competency area except writing. The largest difference between MT and non-MT children was in the competency area of communication, language and literacy, in which MT children scored 26 percentage points higher than non-MT children. These advantages emerge despite the fact that children in SKP pre-schools tended to have significantly fewer economic assets, less access to reading materials at home, and teachers with significantly fewer years of experience. (Vijayakumar, 2010)

However, the findings of the study also suggested why primary school teachers may have been less happy with the progress of MLE children. MLE children had not gained such strong letter recognition and copying skills as the other pre-school children, which appeared to be linked to the use of rote learning techniques. In addition to the higher levels of Bangla vocabulary which Bangla pre-school children may have had, this may have explained why MLE children had been seen as less of an attractive proposition for Bangla-medium primary school teachers.

Although the study highlighted that 'children emerging from a [mother tongue]-based curriculum, in this study, are in a better developmental position to succeed in school – as active, enthusiastic participants – than children who enter a non-[mother tongue] preschool environment', it pointed out concerns that MTBMLE preschool children may be experiencing a more difficult transition into primary school than Bangla-medium pre-school children. This was borne out with some indications that MTBMLE graduates had been recorded attending pre-schools despite being registered in Grade 2 of primary school. Were some children abandoning school attendance to return to a more attractive approach?

This is what can make efforts to reform school language particularly challenging, where the core elements of quality education are not supported by the school system. Much of the research team's reflection processes in Summer 2010 focused on this question of 'how far does change need to go before school systems are suitable for hosting MTBMLE?' Failing to make changes to the wider school system is not an option: large numbers of children are failing in school because the entire system is not appropriate for them to learn.

Next steps

The study recommended that the MTBMLE pre-school programme consider ways to support activity-based learning and the use of the mother tongue in primary school. Also, that before change in primary schools is established, the bridging process, introducing Bangla within pre-school, should be strengthened accordingly. While these two priorities form the basis of the language programme in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the wider implication is that the language programme will need to link up strongly with on-going efforts in the region and nationally to improve the quality of basic education and move towards genuinely learner-centred teaching. As SKP showed, establishing quality teaching does not necessarily require greater resources or stronger human capacity: it does require responsiveness to learners' situations being at the centre of change.

As SKP is at the core of efforts to improve basic education within the larger EC-UNDP education programme for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, steps are being taken to integrate MTBMLE approaches within broader teacher training and leadership strengthening for improved quality of education. For the children involved in MTBMLE, balanced efforts need to be made to protect them from the most disappointing effects of the school system not being ready to support them further through education, at the same time as attempts to bring more effective ways of working into the school system.

All the local and national initiatives which had been tried by the research team to support scale up of elements of the pilot projects had a positive effect in terms of strengthening the conditions for scale up (see Annex 1 for further detail). Better evidence was produced in Bangladesh of the value of mother tongue based multilingual pre-school; and packages of materials and descriptions of MTBMLE components in Vietnam were promoted successfully at national level in Vietnam, securing stronger central Ministry of Education support. However, the most useful aspect of the action research lay in capturing and learning from unexpectedly deep challenges, such as difficulties retaining teacher assistants or recognising the depth of changes needed before primary schools could more dramatically transform children's learning. It was decided to look more widely for experience on dealing with similar challenges.

Broadening the search for experience and learning

Recorded discussions continued as part of regional and international working groups and networks in the UK and East Asia to capture the experiences of international experts working to promote multilingual education. Group discussions structured around the key concerns that had come up in Phase 1 were used to compare experiences of these key issues.

A discussion weblog was set up to capture more international experience around challenges to institutionalising MTBMLE. The blog had 777 unique page views within the first month, and received over 40 detailed comments sharing experience and issues. A wide range of language and education practitioners from around the world got in touch and shared experience and documents (mainly in English). These

ranged from academic researchers in national universities to private school teachers and international NGO staff.

Interviews with other practitioners by telephone and questionnaire to explore some of these issues further followed during Summer 2010. Discussion forums and interviews at two international conferences focusing on language were used to capture the concerns and experiences of researchers and experts working to promote better practice in multilingualism and school language.

The most recurrent theme in the responses was the fear of government, school leadership and parents that reducing the amount of second language used in schools would be unworkable because it is assumed to be a move away from building second language skills. Despite great frustration among teachers and managers who saw the detriment this caused to children's engagement and learning in school, there were strong feelings that any change towards mother tongue teaching would not fulfil second language learning objectives.

Another issue raised by several respondents was the challenging nature of the multiple changes needed to institute multilingual education that was good enough to make a clear difference to children's learning. There was much interest in the question of what to do about settings where more than one mother tongue was present in schools, and concern over how to promote literacy in local languages where capacity to conduct orthography or publish local language materials in multiple languages was weak.

Broadly, from these discussions the same few themes emerged as the biggest challenges towards institutionalising multilingual education. Most respondents volunteered that it was understood in most settings that it was best for children to learn in their mother tongue; but that learning through another language was seen as the next best option to meet all the second-language aims that were incompatible with mother tongue instruction. Mother tongue based multilingual education was seen as encouraging, but those working to promote it were finding that those with the power to make change were unwilling to do so without clearer models and information on how to overcome practical and political challenges.

Central and South America

In general, respondents from Central and South America felt that commitment to multilingual education was in place, but that it was not understood at local levels what it meant to put this into practice, and that insufficient support was being provided from higher levels in the education system to build that understanding. Lack of outreach promotion of multilingual or intercultural education in the rural areas that needed it most, and had the weakest capacity to deliver quality education in general, was a particular concern, and was seen as an indication of weak political will to really deliver on policy for which there was fierce public demand.

Asia

Respondents from both South and East Asia were most commonly concerned about the political and public opinion barriers to apparently reducing access to second language, particularly when this was combined with promoting minority cultures through education. Essentially, Asian stakeholders' perception focused around the view that local, national and international cultures and languages were in competition, particularly when it came to promoting unity and political and social cohesion. The idea of 'unity through diversity' was discussed frequently as being necessary, but respondents did not feel it was well established in policy and public discourse.

Teacher accountability was seen as a major barrier to progress, particularly as teachers' accountabilities to parents, children and policy makers were seen as conflicting. Parents who could hold teachers to account in private schools wanted second language medium in the hope of good jobs for their children; policy makers often said they supported mother tongue teaching but did not manage to get teachers to turn up in government schools, much less deliver quality multilingual teaching; many tended to prefer minority languages and cultural reference points not to be strongly present in education; and children wanted both mother tongue learning and second language skills, but more than that needed friendly, welcoming school experiences.

Africa

Respondents working within African settings in general displayed less anxiety about multiple cultures and languages being seen as a bar to unity, or inviting government repression. Multilingualism and multiculturalism appeared to have stronger policy and public acceptance as a positive set of ideas. However, concerns about capacity of teachers to deliver methods seen as relatively complex and demanding were strong among this group, as were concerns about capacity to write, publish and distribute materials in local languages.

Interestingly, multilingualism and multiculturalism were characterised by some African respondents as something more valued outside education, whereas education was seen as existing to select, streamline and certify achievement for onward progress to greater success. All the skills linked with multiple uses of languages were to do with informal spheres outside school, and therefore languages used outside school could be developed with great variety through fluid interactions. However, school language is often seen as having to be correct and formalised in order for students to receive good marks for accuracy. Thus it becomes more difficult to argue for more space for school language learning which is integrated into local communication needs, as the purely certification-related functions of school language (getting grammar and spelling right in a prestige language such as English) still need to be tackled, taking up large amounts of teaching time.

When it came to political concerns, discussions with African academic and programme contacts revealed valuable insights about the signals that choice of school language sends at community level. The idea of a 'neutral' language of school not linked to any one local ethno-linguistic group was seen as extremely important for communities, particularly where conflict is a major issue. Having an ethnically neutral

language such as English as the language of schooling and therefore of certified achievement therefore responds to two powerful expectations of education which MTBMLE cannot easily serve.

In terms of strategies which respondents proposed to tackle some of these challenges, some recurring recommendations from these discussions were that engaging with parents and with the private sector in education is vital; that tackling orthography of unwritten languages at an early stage is essential to avoiding progress being piecemeal; that tackling literacy in the context of many local languages requires careful strategising; and that society and education policy needs to explicitly recognise the demands on children to grasp multiple languages throughout life, offering carefully thought through solutions as to how children can successfully negotiate these requirements.

Summary of key learning based on experience with changing school language

Through further reflection and analysis of these issues, guidance was produced to help find a way forward in settings where children do not use the current language of school in daily life.

A summary is presented here. It offers advice on how to have the best chance of putting the right changes in place to help children learn in a way they understand. The guidelines are intended to offer advice on how to progressively shift school systems towards delivering effective learning across the curriculum and good language skills in key local, national and international languages.

Which aspects of language have particular implications for attempts to improve education?

Language in education has particular tensions and associations which often make it a sensitive area for reform, subject to much resistance - despite increasing acceptance of the evidence around school language.

Fears that the identity of some groups would be threatened if their language was used less in education appear to underlie resistance in some contexts. Deep distrust between some communities and government can lead to changes promoted by education authorities being seen as automatically negative for traditionally marginalised communities. Religious divisions and mistrust of minority groups' cultural identities are sometimes linked to reluctance to bring children's linguistic and cultural reference points into materials and teaching content.

These deep rooted sensitivities must be recognised and addressed with care. The histories of relationships between different language groups must be made known to people working to change school language, and the likely fears or concerns of different stakeholders should be looked into and factored into communication and coordination efforts.

Which features of the education system are crucial to support successful teaching for children who do not live with the current language of school in their daily lives?

Capacity to deliver active, learner-centred education against a clear curriculum

In some settings barriers to capacity might be a lack of real belief that child-centred methods are important. In others, such as conflict-affected or remote areas, teachers' levels of skills or enthusiasm for teaching may be extremely low. In some places there is simply very little teacher training available. In such situations efforts to upgrade the teacher training and development system for pre-school and primary education must be prioritised, and good practice in using language for teaching should be incorporated into these efforts.

Finding and developing teachers who can communicate with children

Teachers need to use children's language confidently, particularly at the start of education. It is imperative to get speakers of minority or local languages into teaching wherever possible, and as soon as possible.

An ability to share and act on evidence about good practice

It will be essential for key stakeholders at different levels to recognise that strong demands for national or international languages will only be met through carefully introducing second languages to children as part of learning activities across all the thematic areas of the curriculum, rather than delivering the whole curriculum in those languages.

Capacity to coordinate changes across different areas of education management

It has proved important to make sure that different aspects of schooling are updated as part of a linked package of changes. For example, if new textbooks are produced in children's first languages, but teachers have not been trained in how to use them, the textbooks are likely to sit unused. Planning between departments to roll out changes so that they can reinforce each other is important. For example, curriculum developers can be requested to share draft materials with selected teacher training bodies and teachers, who can provide feedback to strengthen them and can incorporate their understanding of the materials into new training plans.

What national-level conditions enable effective transition to better use of languages in basic education?

Situations where strong national leadership who demonstrate a commitment to equitable provision of educational opportunities through flexible, inclusive approaches will most effectively transition to appropriate MTBMLE approaches. This requires a belief in the potential of every learner to achieve high learning outcomes if they receive appropriate educational provision delivered in a language understood by the learner.

An effective language-in-education policy is most likely to be supported by leadership who recognise that national unity can be sustainably achieved through supporting diversity and inclusion. Such leaders also understand that the goals of "Education For All" and universal, quality primary education can best be achieved through education delivered in a way which recognises and respects the needs of learners from each language and culture of their nation.

A national environment which values local languages and encourages their active use in everyday life, including local economies, is valuable in setting a context for effective and sustainable.

Speakers of local languages who have a strong sense of identity and who have formed strong national and local organisations are most likely to give support to MTBMLE.

Post-conflict reconciliation processes should explicitly include language, culture and education strategies.

Continuing teaching in a familiar language right through primary education is very important for children without much access to other languages in their daily lives. It may sound counter-intuitive, but this really is the best approach to making sure that children are in a position to do well in other languages.

What conditions may hinder transition to multilingual basic education?

Not having enough personnel who understand the principles and processes needed for improving school language is a key reason for failure to effectively transition language-in-education policy. Lack of strong awareness building is often a key reason for failure of multilingual education programmes.

Leaders who are not familiar with the evidence and ideas behind MTBMLE may be concerned that reducing the amount of national or international language used in education will reduce children's abilities to use that language. Evidence from pilot work, and from other similar countries, should be useful to convince them otherwise.

Rapid changes of education personnel during a period of trying to establish new approaches can cause problems. The development of clear guidelines for policy implementation and cascaded training approaches that equip staff and community stakeholders at national, regional and local level will help address this issue.

What capacities and resources are supportive?

Ministries of Education and Finance should strategically allocate capital and personnel resources to improve the quality of education for areas where data indicates that ethnicity and language is a key factor in poor school achievement and retention. In such areas, permission should be granted to local education authorities to make adjustments to modes of education delivery so that they can meet local needs in attaining national standards.

In both centralised and decentralised school systems, clear guidelines for implementation will be necessary. These should be provided early on to enable local education authorities to plan and build capacity to deliver against a national policy commitment to teaching based on the languages that children use at home.

Opportunities to help educators at different levels see how MTBMLE works in practice should be taken wherever possible.

Any national or regional drives to improve quality or access in basic education can offer a good opportunity for examining and upgrading school language. Education quality and inclusion initiatives which carry budgets can be tapped into to support improved quality and access through more effective language use.

National or local printing or publishing capacity is valuable to provide the reading materials and localised curriculum support materials that will be required.

It is important to attract and recruit pre-school and primary school teachers who can use local languages and the key second language that children will need to learn.

Bringing good language practice into both pre-service and regular in-service training is important so that these teachers can work effectively. Planning improvements to teacher training at an early stage in any change process is important, so that other outputs like textbooks and literacy materials can be incorporated into new training at different points.

Community members who are mother tongue speakers of the languages to be used in the classroom play a critical role. Organisations such as school management committees or parent-teacher associations, which include parent and community representation, should be recognised and supported by education ministries, or by other bodies such as indigenous peoples' ministries or organisations. With collaboration and communication, new approaches within schools can be linked with other activities by local stakeholders to strengthen the role of their language and culture in development and education.

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ANNEX 1: Case studies of change towards mother tongue based multilingual education

India

Efforts to provide MTBMLE for tribal children in Andhra Pradesh were studied. Against a background of extremely high exclusion and dropout from school in tribal areas, in 2005 representations were made to the secretary of education for the state that an MTBMLE programme should be authorised. The secretary gave approval and strong support. Unlike some multilingual education programmes, this did not start with a small pilot, but conducted large-scale changes in sets of schools designated to become multilingual schools.

The bulk of the changes could be categorised into three main groups: curricular development; literacy and orthography development; teacher training; and teacher recruitment and placement. Tribal communities were already keen to have education in their language, so while communication and coordination with community representatives was important, it was not as crucial as in areas where parental resistance to a change in school language might have been higher.

Funding was available via the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme to develop Education For All in India: states were expected to put in proposals with matched funding to leverage national and donor funds for large-scale education improvement work. The Governments of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa were keen for new initiatives to help them access this support and resources to improve learning outcomes and reduce disparities in achievement. Assisted by university linguists, in Andhra Pradesh scripting and lteracy development took place to enable full teaching in 8 local languages. Starting with ten schools for each language group, the programme is being progressively extended to all tribal schools. In Orissa this extended to 11 languages, reaching 450 schools by 2009. Programme development progressively worked through the primary cycle, developing materials grade on grade.

National policy was already supportive of the principles of learning in mother tongue, but clear guidelines on how to deliver multilingual education for tribal children were required for schools and education offices. These were produced and circulated by the high-level team implementing the new initiative. However, the process of getting sign-off on new instructions was slow in some areas, as not all officials had had enough exposure to the need for multilingual education. This was complicated by moving the Andhra Pradesh programme from the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute to the Education department.

A similar approach was subsequently taken in Orissa, but with responsibility for implementing the MTBMLE programme given to a senior leader in the The Tribal Affairs department. Unlike in Andhra Pradesh, this leadership stayed more consistent, and enabled stronger coordination between different elements of the programme. However, now that the main leader, Dr Mahendra Mishra, has retired, it

is not yet clear whether enough support and orientation has been provided to his successors to drive forward the work.

In Andhra Pradesh, responsibility was initially given to a small group of senior officials working with tribal communities, NGOs and schools, but after the first couple of years responsibility was shifted to a senior team within the primary education division. This was a positive move, in the sense that it gave access to a larger number of schools, and signalled a clear commitment to making significant changes to the primary school system, but the downside was that the people newly in charge of the programme had not received the orientation and enthusiasm which the first team had had, and were not personally so committed to the learning of tribal children. From that point co-ordination suffered more, so that interdependent elements of the programme were not rolled out in such a way as to support each other.

Combined with an enthusiasm for getting new curriculum materials published first rather than tackling more complex systems of teacher training, teacher allocation and school management, this meant that materials were produced long before schools were ready to use them: teachers were not in place and had not been trained. Many teachers had very little access to in service training, offering few opportunities on which to build multilingual education training. These challenges were tackled as a result of the continued supportive leadership and resourcing from the state level, but better coordination could have reduced them.

The strong involvement of national and expatriate linguistic and pedagogical consultants, who worked with stakeholders at all levels, did ensure that orthography and literacy development in local languages was linked with the preparation of curriculum materials and textbooks. It also ensured that key people at different levels got exposed to clear evidence and arguments about why this approach was needed, and what it should involve in practical terms.

Although good practice indicated that communities should have free choice over new scripts, in Andhra Pradesh the decision was made to use the state script for languages that did not have a traditional script. Concerns over script choice were addressed through a relatively transparent process, where decision makers in the education system were open and clear about their concerns, the policy framework, and the practical parameters. This may have helped stakeholders to continue to support the process.

Lessons were learned about engaging with teachers. Teachers were not all supportive of the changes, especially as they involved moving teachers to different schools according to which tribal language they spoke. In Orissa in particular, teachers who had been working in urban areas and were then required to move to more rural areas tended to be particularly unhappy, and resisted being moved. Incentives were provided, but several teachers tried to use their influence with local education officials to avoid being moved. This set back the large-scale rollout of the programme in some areas. However, strong coordination between senior and more local levels in the school management system did achieve changes in teacher postings. More communication and marketing of the changes to teachers, and stronger incentives for teachers to move, would also have helped.

A very positive aspect of the Andhra Pradesh initiative has been the recognition of the need to change testing and assessment so that children are assessed in their own language. This is now being rolled out for formal examinations as well as school-based assessment, and is providing strong motivation for teachers and parents to support the changes.

The programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa have achieved a large amount of change to deep-rooted structures and habits in the school system in a short time. However, the language programmes have revealed the poor state of basic teacher training and practice, which continues to offer a weak foundation on which to build multilingual education. As these fundamental issues continue to be improved, with continued support from leadership the other parts of the system which have been developed for multilingual education will be able to come into play more powerfully.

Bangladesh

Political support for the use of first language in education is strong in Bangladesh, as the country was founded on the right to use Bangla as a medium of education and official life. However, in indigenous minority areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there was little understanding that speakers of other languages were being excluded by the use of Bangla for teaching. Dropout of minority indigenous children from primary school was 60%, double the national average (Durnnian, 2007). With pressure to increase the use of English and promote Bangla as the national language, teaching in minority languages was seen as doubly irrelevant by many in the higher levels of the education system.

The indigenous people's governing bodies, the Hill District Councils, had been given the right to manage education in the 1997 Peace Accords, which ended a period of conflict between indigenous groups and those from the Bangla group who were increasingly moving into the area to seek land. In effect, however, government schools were managed more directly by officials from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and from the Bangla authorities in the region.

A 'one size fits all' approach to improving school quality tended to be rolled out in government schools, although many NGO-run schools had been trying varied attempts to introduce mother tongue and bilingual education. There was much duplication and little coordination in these NGO efforts.

Indigenous people's groups and networks were relatively strong, but there was little confidence that practical solutions could be found to help children get over language barriers in school. There was also concern that efforts to promote indigenous languages in education could cause concern among conservative officials keen to promote Bangla culture in the region. While minority and indigenous people did train to become teachers, their numbers were small and the minority language skills that they brought to education were not being considered as particularly relevant. Many local languages were not used sufficiently for reading and writing to enable strong literacy in school. Some languages did not have a script, or had not yet agreed on a common script to make standardisation for education easier.

Nevertheless, the recognition of the importance of mother tongues to people in Bangladesh did provide a supportive environment to discuss the difficulties that children were having in school. Save the Children and local indigenous partner organisations came together to crate a pilot programme which would demonstrate a practical approach to MTBMLE for local and national audiences. This approach was based on experience in Cambodia and other countries, and set up a good quality multilingual pre-school approach which focused strongly on strengthening children's first language and introducing them to Bangla. The intention was to get support to bring these approaches into primary education, but also to help children cope better with teaching in Bangla if they entered primary school before changes had been introduced.

The programme, Shishur Khamatayan, started in 2006 and proved very popular with communities, enabling people with basic education from indigenous communities to train as teachers, and receive literacy training in their own languages in order to teach children how to read and write. Basic initial training was provided and then topped up frequently. 60 community pre-schools were set up on an inclusive basis, close to children's homes and welcoming to all, reaching over 1200 children.

Communities were closely involved in managing the schools and choosing and reviewing scripts and learning materials. Zabarang Kalyang Samity, the main indigenous people's organisation, set up language committees within each language group to agree choice of script and how to capture or revive the languages in written form. These involved artists, musicians, scholars and other people seen as having good knowledge of the culture and language. These higher-level groups were balanced by local school management groups formed of parents and local people who reviewed literacy and school materials, thus ensuring accountability at top and bottom for the language of school accurately reflecting the language and culture of indigenous groups. These groupings were vital to ensure that indigenous communities backed the new approach. They were set up so that they could work with education experts and officials to collaboratively develop the programme.

Trust building of this nature was extremely important. When some statements or decisions by officials who had not fully understood the approach threatened to disrupt progress, or when salaries were delayed, the local stakeholders continued to drive the work forward because they had faith that it was done to benefit them. Similarly, the NGO partners made sure that local and national education officials received many chances to see the schools running well and to understand the evidence for a new approach. Officials were given full access to the programme so that they could see that efforts to create new scripts were educationally driven, rather than an attempt to segregate children from Bangla education and culture. This atmosphere of trust and respect was important at key points such as the choice of one community to use a script used by the same group in India. This could have met with significant government resistance had it been seen as an effort to promote solidarity with another country.

To get wider replication of the approach into NGO and government schools, continued networking and lobbying led to the involvement of the partners in the large programme for education improvement in the region, funded by the European Commission and managed by the UN Development Programme. Gradually, through

experience and data sharing, conferences and decision-making meetings among programme partners, it was agreed that multilingual education should be brought into the wider teacher training and school improvement work that the larger programme was undertaking. The orthography and materials development work extended from three to eight languages, and will take in twelve.

Direct local attempts to get government primary schools to change the language they used for teaching proved difficult, however. Head teachers were not willing to make changes unilaterally, and most teachers only speak Bangla. Clear directives and training initiatives from the central education authorities in Dhaka will be needed for this to happen. For children going from multilingual preschool to Bangla medium primary school, confidence and knowledge are strong but they are hampered by having little Bangla vocabulary. As a result a decision was made in project schools to introduce more Bangla during the last year of pre-school, balanced with the need to strengthen mother tongue.

A decision meeting supported by the programme gained national and local authorisation for a clear delineation of responsibility to District Hill Councils for managing education, freeing them up to guide and support schools to use multilingual approaches. The Chittagong Hill Tracts education programme will now support Hill Councils to build the capacities of education management teams, providing training for them in how to support and supervise MTBMLE.

To make the outcomes of this programme sustainable, the ways in which teacher training institutes work will need to be addressed in the longer term. Discussions are under way to encourage one of the two regional institutes to take on all teachers for the region, and to incorporate training in MTBMLE into training curricula.

Lobbying of government through the creation of a national NGO network to promote multilingual education has led to recognition at national levels that MTBMLE should be promoted for indigenous children. This is now reflected in the new national Education Strategy, which will provide a basis for the next coordinated donor assistance plan for education. The national NGO group is also collaborating to work towards more consistent good practice on language in NGO schools.

There are still challenges and tensions around changes to school language in a fragile post-conflict setting. Achieving consistent resourcing levels are an issue, particularly for non-formal community schools. Making sure that learning outcomes from NGO schools are shown to be producing strong learning outcomes in relation to national curriculum competencies is vital to securing credibility for further extension of the approach, and more funds have been invested in research.

There are challenges ahead in balancing the priorities of many people: national and local government staff; security and education departments; donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs; high level indigenous people and local adults and children. Concerns about ensuring that children have access to nationally agreed levels of quality in educational content and teaching practice are strong. Difficulties around whether to use multiple scripts on a large scale or use one script are also yet to be fully resolved. However, there is now a strong network of people inside and outside

education who fully understand the arguments for MTBMLE for indigenous children, and who are both demanding and pursuing continued progress.

The combination of local enthusiasm for multilingual education and a supportive policy environment have been powerful. It has still been necessary to link national and local more closely, and to establish clear guidelines and capacities on previously unclear issues around the basic functioning of the school system. As this process continues it is hopeful that dramatically improved inclusion of indigenous children in learning will happen.

Vietnam

Although most Vietnamese children enrol in school, many do not get a good education, particularly children who are poor and from a minority ethnic group. Many of these children live in remote rural areas where they have little or no exposure to Vietnamese outside school, yet all teaching is done in Vietnamese by teachers from the Kinh majority ethnic group. Despite high standards of teacher training and quality, many of these teachers are able to achieve little for their pupils due to the language barrier. Central government was reluctant to replace teaching in Vietnamese with minority languages, and did not feel that bilingual teaching approaches from other countries were relevant to Vietnam. Several attempts by international agencies to promote bilingual education had stalled at the initial stages.

There were plenty of barriers to teaching children in their first language. Few young people from minorities had done well enough in education to qualify as a teacher, and most other teachers did not speak minority languages. The national curriculum and learning materials were all in Vietnamese, and teachers were not expected to deviate from them. Education was highly centralised and assumptions were that centrally developed models of teaching were the best quality and therefore should be available to all. Several minority areas had a history of poor relations and tensions between government and communities.

In 2006 Save the Children started a programme to demonstrate that bilingual education for minority children was necessary and feasible in all parts of the country. At the time, it was difficult to suggest that children were doing badly because they did not understand Vietnamese: it was the language of national pride and unity, and it was assumed that all Vietnamese children would be able to pick it up.

Strong evidence was presented through education sector groups to provincial and national education authorities that learning in a child's first language is the best way for them to learn a national language. Teachers were brought forward to express their frustration at children not understanding school to senior officials, and Save the Children worked with national research institutes to produce research showing that language was the biggest barrier to minority children's success in school.

Working with international experts, Save the Children produced a model of bilingual education to fit conditions in some of the most remote and challenging parts of Vietnam, in four communes of Dien Bien and Quang Ninh provinces. This complemented a larger bilingual education pilot supported by UNICEF in less complex districts. People from minority communities were recruited and trained to

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work as teaching assistants to qualified teachers. A 'bilingual team teaching approach' was developed where the teaching assistant delivered most of the lesson, with the teacher introducing key Vietnamese terms for the learning points that had just been taught. In this way children learned new things in a language they could understand, and gradually learned more and more Vietnamese. The programme also made sure that teachers had strong formats and methods to record the progress children made, both in Vietnamese language and the rest of the curriculum.

There was concern that minority languages were not suitable for literacy, or did not have scripts, and there were political sensitivities around the use of minority scripts to replace Vietnamese. The difficult question of whether or not children could learn to read in minority languages was put on hold, with the aim of showing that if children could at least be taught orally in their first language they would do much better in school.

At first, obtaining permission to conduct even a small pilot was difficult, as some education authorities were worried that they would risk trouble for trying a new approach. It was not possible to conduct any work without clear official permission. A lot of work went into reassuring local authorities that they could try new things, and into obtaining permission from the right people at central level.

The adapted curriculum, materials and bilingual education model were piloted in nine primary schools. As soon as classes started it was clear that children were engaging, participating and performing a hundred times better than before. Officials got to see the new classes and were able compare them with other classes in the same schools: vibrant and happy children delighted that they knew the answers, compared with tense, confused and silent children straining to understand.

Despite the schools pilot involving less than 30 schools, the use of evidence and demonstration from the work led to much wider change. The programme team encouraged experts in a major World Bank education project to visit the bilingual classes. As a result, Save the Children was asked to develop training, learning materials to support new teaching techniques and support to minority teaching assistants. The approach was presented as a more effective way of teaching Vietnamese – recognising that it is a second language for minority children, and therefore has to be acquired 'through the mother tongue.' These approaches are now used in all schools of the World Bank project with children from minority ethnic groups in 40 provinces.

The Ministry of Education and Training formally recognised that Vietnamese was a second language for minority children, and that it was better for children to learn through their first language. There is still some work to be done to help education authorities put the new policy into practice, but it is likely that progress will be more rapid from now on.

Annex 2 – examples of discussion questions asked of international respondents working in multilingual education

- How can primary school teachers be supported to gain skills to introduce second language/s to children?
- How can parents be reassured that being taught in a mother-tongue and then taught a second language is likely to work? What steps should governments take to reassure parents on this?
- How can leaders be persuaded to adopt education in local languages if they are worried about national disunity?
- How can teacher training be updated to help teachers teach second languages to children successfully?
- What are some of the best ways to address difficulties in finding teachers who speak the children's local languages?
- How can children's literacy be supported when it's difficult to find written forms of local languages?
- What should donor agencies do to address these challenges? What type of leadership and funding should donors provide on language and education?
- Have you had any experiences of making education easier for pre or primary school children who don't speak the official languages? What is the learning from these?
- Have you had experience of helping children transition from one language of teaching to another? What learning did you get from this?
- What advice would you give to teachers managing classes where several children speak different languages at home, and national or international languages are not used in children's home life?

Examples of input from international language and education actors

Stephen Massey

Here in Nepal, there is no accountability of teachers in government school (currently switching from teaching in Nepali to teaching in MT). This leads to poor performance of teachers in government schools, with high absence rates and little sense of the need to teach to actually empower children. Conversely, private schools have high levels of teacher accountability. This combined with the already selective nature of private schools, leads to a higher achievement of private school students, compared to government schools in which achievement is generally low. Since private schools invariably teach in English medium, this leads to the false perception amongst parents, and even educators, that the English medium teaching ITSELF leads to improved performance, thus increasing pressure for more schools to teach in English medium. In summary, any education, in whatever language, is only ever as good as the motivation and educational outlook of the teachers permit.

Fiona Willans

Grass-roots level participation is essential, so that local communities take some responsibility for creating materials and identifying teaching assistants. Parent involvement in the classroom also helps so that they become ambassadors of the project in the wider community. For me it is not so much about convincing parents and leaders that programmes WILL work (Q 2&3) but finding momentum to get them started, initially on a small scale, and ensuring they are implemented well enough to demonstrate that they DO work.

In order to do this, certain things must be in place. Written forms of the languages must be developed first by trained linguists so that the languages can be used in a systematic way. Rushing at this stage will not achieve anything in the long-term. Organisations can provide training on materials development as well as templates for story books and simple technologies such as screen printing, and teachers must be well supported. It is difficult where there are several MTs in the same class but, as others have mentioned, there are alternatives such as using teaching assistants or having other initial literacy classes prior to formal school. Governments are most likely to be convinced by looking to other countries where such programmes have been implemented successfully. However, governments in many countries will need to decentralise enough of the power in the education system in order to let bottom-up versions of a general policy be implemented effectively.