The impact of linguistic policy and planning on inclusive education in Bangladesh

By Lawrence Besra

The children of indigenous communities in northern Bangladesh encounter language barriers in primary schooling; this appears to be an alarming challenge for inclusive education. Children from ethnic communities encounter multiple forms of vulnerabilities and difficulties in fully accessing primary education in Bangladesh.

The essence of inclusive education is that it promotes the opportunity and right of every child from diverse backgrounds to be accommodated in mainstream primary education irrespective of religion, caste, and ethnicity, and including physically and mentally challenged children. As a holistic approach, inclusive education caters to the special needs of children from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds and marginalized ethnic communities. Further, inclusive education increases differently-abled children’s access to schooling along with ensuring their participation in mainstream education and society.

In the Bangladeshi context, significant initiatives have been taken to incorporate ethnic minority children through introducing bilingual textbooks and translating some Bangla textbooks in the learners’ mother tongues. But the state’s dominant language policy and failure to address the diverse needs of ethnic minority languages and cultures appear to be impediments for achieving inclusive education in Bangladesh. To address the diverse aspects of inclusive education, an education policy that meets some needs of indigenous children is required for breaking language and other social barriers for ethnic minority students. This would move towards creating a sustainable social cohesive education policy in the present context of Bangladesh.