MTB-MLE initiatives and advocacy efforts for indigenous language communities of northern Pakistan

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Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country with over 70 living languages, out of which nearly 30 are spoken in the northern region. Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI) started its operations in 2002 to promote, preserve, and document these lesser-known languages.

Language of instruction at school and unclear education policy are among the top country issues. The mother tongues of children are not taught in early school years. For this reason FLI felt the need to advocate for MTB-MLE and started developing capacity among three language communities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in curriculum and instructional materials development, school management, and teacher training. Since 2008, these projects have been flourishing, and there was a greater demand to establish more schools, especially for girls. Subsequently, other three language communities started their training in 2011, launched their pilot preschools, and will soon complete the first two-year cycle.

Throughout these years, FLI has continued its advocacy and mobilization efforts in the communities and with the provincial government and NGOs. As a result, the provincial government introduced five regional languages in 2011 as a compulsory subject in all educational institutions up to intermediate level under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Regional Languages Authority Act, 2011. Any regional language has to be taught in the area where it is spoken by the local residents. Another bill was tabled in national assembly to recognize all languages as national languages. One standing committee was formed by policymakers to further pursue this.

Through various awareness-raising activities such as celebration of International Mother Language Day and International Literacy Day in the communities and big cities, more coverage is being given to these issues through digital, print media, and TV.