Mother tongue community learning circle: Laitu mother tongue learning environment set-up project in Rakhine, Myanmar

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The mother tongue community learning circle project was started in 2014 in the 12 Laitu Chin villages in Rakhine State, Myanmar. It aims to help mother tongue (MT) teachers, to make more Laitu reading materials, and to raise adult models of reading and writing.

Learning circles were formed with the village committees as a management body. Facilitators were trained in Laitu literacy to facilitate learner-centered activities. They facilitate a once-a-week meeting using Laitu stories, songs, games, pictures, and the primer.

In the beginning, many did not see the benefit of mother-tongue literacy and some leaders did not cooperate; only a few could read and write in the language. But within two years, more people became interested and supportive, facilitators became more confident, and more Laitu stories were drafted. Some village committees support the facilitators financially, and one village is committed to run the mother-tongue based early childhood care and development (ECCD) program starting in June 2016. More villages are preparing to run a MT-ECCD program and develop a community library.

The current situation in Myanmar is that education is accessible only in dominant languages. Within this context, learning circle provides a relevant and happy mother tongue learning experience. It gives space for communities to appreciate their heritage, culture, and language; children and adults experience happy learning; and the communities become resourceful. With resource persons from within the community and the community-owned management system in place, the community can engage in the community-defined development process, which should lead to long-lasting development results.