Panel session: Language Education and Social Cohesion (LESC) Initiative in Malaysia and Myanmar

This panel will highlight two action researches conducted from 2013–2015 by the University of Melbourne in partnership with the UNICEF country offices of Malaysia and Myanmar, and the UNICEF—East Asia and Pacific Region Office (UNICEF—EAPRO).

These studies were piloted in the said countries in response to the risks that children face in educational and non-educational contexts associated with language and ethnicity issues, among others. In its work in Malaysia and Myanmar, the LESC Initiative has shown that governments can influence and mitigate language issues and contribute to social cohesion especially, but not only, through education.

The above studies were part of the Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) Program of UNICEF—EAPRO that has been designed to enhance the capacity of government institutions as well as generate additional evidence on policies and programing related to education, conflict, and peacebuilding.

There will be a general discussion of the LESC Initiative by UNICEF—EAPRO. This will be then followed by presentations of the LESC Initiative by the Malaysia and Myanmar UNICEF country offices.

This panel is a platform where UNICEF can publicly disseminate the experiences and challenges of the LESC Initiative in Malaysia and Myanmar, and touch on the strategies that facilitated the generation of the studies’ findings along the themes on social conflict, language and language education, and social cohesion.

The PBEA Program and the LESC Initiative

By Joseph Lo Bianco

This presentation will highlight the results of the multicountry research of the LESC Initiative (2013–2015) in Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand. It will focus on 10 key findings that have been seen to promote understanding of the forms and possibilities of language planning for fostering human rights, improved education, and social cohesion.

The discussion will also be anchored on the LESC Initiatives’ main program, PBEA (2012–2015/16). Managed by UNICEF—EAPRO, the PBEA program’s discussion will focus on its dual outcomes of institutional capacity building and evidence generation, upon which it has been designed to contribute to the enhancement of the existing platforms of peacebuilding, social cohesion, and education.
LESC Initiative in Malaysia

By Victor P. Karunan

This presentation covers the recently-completed *Malaysia Country Report: Language Education and Social Cohesion (LESC) Initiative*. It will discuss how stakeholders will be provided with enhanced platforms for integrating policies, strategies, and programs that will contribute to the systematic resolution of language-related challenges in a country with as much diversity as Malaysia. One of these mechanisms is the conduct of Facilitated Dialogues, with the aim of developing a comprehensive language planning and policy framework to foster national unity, social cohesion, and collaborative social relations.

Aligned with the results and recommendations of the Malaysia LESC Country Report, the presentation will also highlight policy-related agreements developed in the Malaysia Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education, providing more evidence of the imperative to review existing language-related policies for the enhanced protection and promotion of the educational rights and welfare of the marginalized and vulnerable sectors, especially the children and youth of the indigenous peoples in Malaysia.

LESC Initiative in Myanmar

By Malar San and Aung Naing Oo

This presentation will focus attention on how the LESC Initiative has fostered an evidence-based approach to tackling problems in language education; this is important in a diverse Myanmar society comprising more than 135 spoken languages.

The presentation will also highlight the context and perspective of the participatory action research conducted in Mon State, the emerging impact of which has been the consensus and commitment towards the adoption of a comprehensive multilingual language policy for Mon State. The various challenges in program implementation of policies related to MTB-MLE as well as the resolutions designed to tackle them will also be touched on.