An analytical framework to inform strategic and programmatic decisions around language in education: cases from India, Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea

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The “language landscape” at the school, community, subnational, and national levels has a profound effect on the extent to which learners succeed in school and ultimately participate fully in the social, political, and economic spheres in their respective country. Decisions about language of instruction and the instructional methodology to be used in the classroom are not always based on a clear analysis of the language landscape at the school level, the community level, the subnational, and national levels.

In most, if not all, countries the language landscape at any one of these levels is highly diverse and complex. The instances of schools that serve learners from only one language group are typically limited to those schools in the most remote areas of a country where the language landscape is seemingly mono-dimensional.

While the MTB-MLE agenda operates on the assumption that mono-dimensional linguistic landscapes are the norm and focuses on these contexts, the reality is that most learners in most classrooms globally come from a variety of language backgrounds and interact at the community and subnational level with a variety of language users. Teachers in classrooms that serve learners from diverse language groups need to have strong skills in second language teaching and learning, yet second language instruction is seldom the focus in a time that is dominated by the MTB-MLE agenda.

This presentation offers a conceptual framework for unpacking the language landscape and provides a set of critical questions that need to be considered when determining what language should be used in a school and what the instructional methodology should be. India, Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea are offered as examples.