Role of languages in achieving some major SDGs in the ethnolinguistic communities in Nepal

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This paper examines the strategic roles of language in achieving some major Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relative to poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, climate action, and partnerships especially in ethnolinguistic communities in Nepal. It suggests some strategies based on experiences gained in during the linguistic survey of Nepal for meeting challenges and barriers in those communities for achieving the goals.

Nepal has almost achieved the Millennium Development Goals related to poverty and hunger, universal primary education, and gender equality and women’s empowerment, except for environmental sustainability and global partnership (NPC/N, 2013). However, Nepal has to strive further to address, through education, some cross-cutting issues such as poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, climate action, etc, especially in ethnolinguistic communities, which constitute more than 55 percent of the total population (CBS, 2012). Due to lack of equal access to education in the mother tongue and textbooks in the mother tongue containing respective cultural content, most of such communities are marginalized and excluded from most of the development processes of the nation. Despite the constitutional right to education in mother tongue, in practice, children of such communities are compelled to learn unfamiliar content instructed in an unfamiliar language (Shaeffer, 2007).

Language is crucial for a successful education. Multilingual education promotes life-crucial knowledge and cognitive development, which are basic for quality education. The cross-cutting issues need to be integrated into the overall process of teaching in the mother tongue. Above all, a promising multilingual education policy should be framed, taking linguistic diversity into account to maintain the retention rate and to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education.