Language, Education and Social Cohesion Initiative in Myanmar

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Outline

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• Challenges
Background

- **Capital:** Nay Pyi Taw
- **Location:** Largest country in mainland southeast Asia (676,578 km²)
- **Population:** 52 million (estimated); rich in natural resources,
- **High diversity:** at least 135 national ethnic groups; over 100 languages. Some ethnic groups are the Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan
- **Governance:** NLD government is elected and ruling the country starting from 1st April 2016; period of extensive political, economic and social reform,
- **Peace process:** progressing; Despite the gradual transition to democracy, some key past issues and contests still remain: criticisms of ethnic groups about ethnic rights, identity and development
Global Commitment

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention and opened it for signature on 20 November 1989 (the 30th anniversary of its Declaration of the Rights of the Child). The CRC was ratified by 191 countries. Myanmar ratified CRC in 1991.

- Article 28: Children have the right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children’s human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthier countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

- Article 29: Education should develop each child’s personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, their cultures, and other cultures.

Education 2030, Incheon Declaration and Sustainable Development Goals (17)

SDG 4: ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’
366. Every citizen, in accord with the educational policy laid down by the Union

(a) has the right to education;

(b) shall be given basic education which the Union prescribes by law as compulsory;

(c) have the right to conduct scientific research, explore science, work with creativity and write to develop the arts and conduct research freely in other branches of culture.

368. The Union shall honor and assist citizens who are outstanding in education irrespective of race, religion and sex according to their qualifications.
Legal Framework (Contd..)

Multisectoral ECD Policy was adopted in 2013;
Policy Strategies No.4 : Preschool education for children, 3 to 4 years

Implement and expand high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and inclusive preschool education, ..........

No.5. Transition, kindergarten and early primary grades, 5 to 8 years

Develop a strong transition program for children from 4 to 5 years of age from home and preschool to inclusive kindergarten and primary school that includes parent participation in the schools, use of the mother tongue for learning basic concepts to the extent possible and as requested, and child-centred approaches with active learning methodologies for early grade teaching.

National Education Law (2014/2015)

National Education Law (NEL) is approved by parliament in September 2014 and the NEL was further strengthened with the passing of the NEL Amendment in 2015

Article 43 ; The use of national language and Myanmar Language bilingually as classroom language is allowed.

Article 44/B: Teaching of national language is allowed to be administered by each State or Regional Government.
Legal Framework (Contd…)

**National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21: NESP goal:** Improved teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions.

**12 Education Sector Reform Priorities**

No. 3: Support and promote ethnic languages and cultures, including primary-age ethnic children who speak different languages

**Nine Transformational Shifts:**

1. Preschool and Kindergarten education
2. Basic Education - Access, Quality, and Inclusion
3. Basic Education Curriculum
4. Student Assessment and examinations
5. Teacher Education and Management
6. Alternative Education
7. TVET
8. Higher Education
9. Management, Capacity Development and Quality Assurance

Current Situation: In accordance with NEL, Government recently formed **National Education Policy Commission** with 21 members and Planning to form **National Curriculum Committee**.

Planning to launch NESP (2016-21) – 5 years plan very soon
KEY ISSUES

• 118 languages are listed in Myanmar, 135 officially-recognised ethnic groups; an estimated 30% of the population are from groups other than the majority Bamar and are not necessarily using Myanmar as their mother tongues; schools and literacy programs cannot provide quality language education in these languages.

• According to National Education Law endorsed and amended by Government in the year 2014 and 2015 respectively, children from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds are at a disadvantage when they start school because Myanmar is the only language of instruction.

• Some decision makers, technical level officials, parents, and children often have strong views on preserving the Myanmar language in education but have a limited understanding of the ways in which children learn, and how they learn language.

• Many ethnic children face the language barrier in addition to other barriers – poverty, accessibility- and children from early grade do not respond well to learning in the Myanmar language and face difficulty actively participating in their learning, which can lead to school dropouts.

• Language is also closely linked to identity, pride, and fear of loss of culture, and can be a driver of conflict. This makes language of instruction not only a technical issue but also a political issue.

• Safeguarding the position of ethnic languages is a key concern for many non-state actors as part of ceasefire negotiations. Simplistic solutions risk fuelling further conflict.
The LESC Initiative in Myanmar

- Since 2014 all across Myanmar discussion has been underway on language policy.

- Sponsored by the Language and Social Cohesion (LESC) Initiative of UNICEF in close cooperation with the Myanmar Ministry of Education. Designed and led by Professor Lo Bianco of Melbourne University.

- It has involved many hundreds of people from diverse groups of stakeholders, including government, education professionals, legal experts, civil society, ethnic groups, ethnic education service providers, parliamentarians, political party and community representatives.

- This process has brought together people with different perspectives to look at how to improve education and social cohesion in this country.
Focus of LESC in Myanmar

- To support Government led Comprehensive Education Sector Review and Reform process
- To promote peace building through language policy
- To transfer skills in language planning
- To solve language issues and problems through democratic facilitated dialogues and evidence based policy writing
- To encourage collaboration between experts, communities, and government
- To make sure children who do not speak the national language to get a quality education like others
PROCESS

• Aim: support groups debating, or contesting social issues to discuss policy alternatives, especially when these are the cause of conflict, tension, or policy paralysis

• Stresses the process of decision-making as much as the final result

• A process of language planning in which skills and concepts of language policy writing were developed and transferred to all participants

• Attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, State MPs, ethnic leaders, teacher educators, teachers, researchers and academics, CSOs such as Mon, PaO and Kayin Literature & Culture Committees, ethnic service providers (MNEC, KED), and NGOs

• Approval and support sought from MOE and State government to implement the process at Union & State levels
Consultation
* Observations, field visits, interviews all across Myanmar 2013-2016
* Circulation of principles with working groups at the state and Union level
* Incorporation of feedback and questionnaire responses

~ 20 Facilitated Dialogues
at Union, region and state levels

The Mandalay Conference
Feb 8-11, 2016

Specialist inputs
* The languages of Myanmar
* English in Myanmar and ASEAN
* Special needs (Sign Language and education for disadvantaged groups)
* Case studies of multilingualism, at community and local school level
* Policy Environment Scan

Combining all these inputs into a consolidated policy proposal

An agreed draft language policy
(Approval will be requested from government of the principles, policy aims and implementation plans)
Facilitated dialogues

Participants do action-based language planning. Guided by a facilitator participants write policy agreements and build local solutions to problems of language.
The Activity

- Close cooperation with civil society partners, ethnic language and culture groups, teachers, civil servants, and parents

- 22 “Facilitated Dialogues”, several research projects, a large number of direct consultations and site visits, interviews, observations, and professional training activities

- International Conference on Language Policy and Planning in Multilingual Settings, February 2016 (put language policy ‘on the map’.)

- Language Symposium July 2016 Sharing Experience on Development of Facilitated Dialogues from Mon, Kayin and Kachin States.
List of Activities

**National Language Policy Process:**
- First Union-wide facilitated dialogue 29-30 July 2014,
- 2nd Union-wide facilitated dialogues 18-20 Mar 2015,
- Language Symposium Sharing Experience on Development of Facilitated Dialogues from Mon, Kayin and Kachin States 11-13 July 2016

**International Conference:**
- International Conference on Language Policy and Planning in Multilingual Settings 8-11 Feb 2016, 384 delegates from 37 countries attended the Conference at the University of Mandalay from 8-11 February 2016

**Kachin State (Process)**
- 1st FD, Kachin 2-3/12/2015
- 2nd FD, Kachin 14-16/3/2016
- 3rd FD, Kachin 20-21/5/2016

**Mon State (Process)**
- First Facilitated Dialogue, Mon 27-28/5/2014,
- 2nd Facilitated Dialogue, Mon; 6-7/11/2014,
- 3rd Facilitated Dialogue, Mon, 11-12/2/2015;
- 4th (Public consultation meeting), Mon, 19/10/2015;

**Kayin State (Process)**
- First Facilitated Dialogue, Kayin 11-13/6/2015
- 2nd Facilitated Dialogue, Kayin; 23-24/10/2015
- 3rd FD in Kayin, - 5-6/12/2015
- 4th and final FD in Kayin 11-13/5/2016

**Two Inclusive Communication Dialogues in Yangon for special education**
Leadership and stakeholders
NPT principles (providing a consistent approach across the Union).

**Unity**: learn Myanmar language

**Diversity**: ethnic groups maintain languages

**Cohesion**: participation for all minorities

**Education**: equal access, literacy and life skills

**Employment**: language skills for jobs

**Services**: interpreting in health and law

**International**: English other strategic languages

**Inclusion**: people communication difficulties

**Ethnic rights**: recognize indigenous cultures
State Policy Dialogues
Outcome of Mon State Dialogue –

Preamble: Mon State Language Policy and Planning

• နိဒါန္◌း
• မြန္ႀကီးအသီးသီး ၏ ြဖံ႕ၿဖိဳးမႈသည္ေနထုိင္သာ တိုင္ႀကာစာထားမ်ားအားလံုးဝိုင္ဝန္ပါဝင္ကရန္ျဖစါသည္။ သို႔ပါ၍ ြမန္ႀကာအ�တင္းမိုးသည္ေကသာ တိုင္ႀကားမ်ားအားလံုးဝိုင္းပါဝင္ကရန္ျဖစါသည္။

ဗမာလူမ်ားအျပင္ျပည္ေထာင္ေကသာ တိုင္ႀကားမ်ားြစာတို႔မွီတင္ႀကားေနထိုင္ကပါသည္။ ေက်ာင္ႀကား (သို႔မဟုတ္) ပညာေရးက႑တင္သံုးႏိုင္းဖျပဳေေနသာ သငာကားမ႑ိင္က႑တင္၄င္ႀကားေန႔စဥံႏွင္ႀကားမည္ျဖစါကပိုမိုထိေရာကာ ေအထာက္အကူႏိုင္ခံယူပါ သည္။ သို႕ျဖစါသျဖင္႔ိုင္းတကာ ဘာသာစကားမ်ားသငာကားႏိုင္းဖျချပဳသငာကာမူဝါဒကို ေရးဆဲတင္ႀကားသည္။

ဗမာပြိုင္စာသငာကားအား (Mother-tongue Based Education Policy) တင္ႀကားသည္။
Two Significant movements  (International and National)

8-11 February 2016
University of Mandalay

12-13 February 2016
Naypyitaw

The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Ministry of Education

You are cordially invited to attend the Symposium for Sharing Experience on Development of Facilitated Dialogues on National Races Languages Planning.

Date: 11 July 2016 (Monday)
Welcome Reception (17:00 hr – 20:00 hr)
12-13 July 2016 (Tuesday – Wednesday)
Workshops (08:30 hr – 16:30 hr)

Venue: Yadanar Ball Room, PARKROYAL HOTEL, Nay Pyi Taw

RSVP to: 067-430164, 067-430162, 067-430152
Key Message from Minister (MoEA) – Closing Speech

This process will greatly support:

• National development,
• Peace,
• Protection of ethnic rights and
• Social cohesion and welfare of ethnic groups.

• By systematically bridging the gap between the ethnic language and Burmese language in order to prevent difficulties in learning at the primary school level for those children who only know their ethnic language, learning can be successfully continued using Burmese at the middle school level, and English at the high school level in basic education.

• This will result in decreasing the dropout rate of primary school children who only know their ethnic language, and as this will lead to the development of modern educated youth among ethnic peoples, this new generation will be able to bring about lasting peace, which is most important for our country and which is included among the objectives of developing a national language policy.

• Based on the experiences gained from today’s symposium on a National Language Policy, I would like to urge those states and regions which have yet to form a State or Regional language policy, to make efforts to develop a language policy as soon as possible. Only then will it be possible to prescribe and implement a Nation Language Policy, based on the State and Region language policies.

• In accordance with democratic practices, beginning with widespread consultations of the policy at the grassroots level in States and Regions, I would like to urge
  • Relevant ethnic literature and culture committees,
  • Scholars,
  • Representatives of civil society organizations,
  • State and region government institutions and responsible persons from parliament, to actively and fully participate in the prescribed work processes to be carried out successfully. Thank you very much.
Outcome - **National and State Language Policy Process**

**Peace Promoting…..**

- constructive and positive relationships formed between many stakeholders especially between government and non-state actors: Social Cohesion
- problem solving through evidence and comparison of available models to support local innovation;
- established a dialogue space where MLE was discussed
- a sense of ownership and agency around languages and education
- stimulated a demand for policy development on the part of government
- moved towards constructive and deliberated common ground around education law reform and multilingual provision in education.

**Products:**

- **Draft National Language Policy Principles** (provides consistency across the Union)
- **Draft Mon State Language Policy and Planning** and handed over to State Government officially
- **Draft Kayin State Language Policy and Planning** and handed over to Chief Minister by technical team
- **Draft Kachin State Language Policy and Planning** and shared with Deputy Speaker of Kachin Parliament. He is also member of policy development team
- 3 specialist research studies (languages of Myanmar, English in Myanmar, Special Education)
GOVERNMENT’S IMPLEMENTATION

The government in Myanmar has 2 levels: union and state. The following is implementation at these 2 levels.

Union Government
- has introduced education reforms enacted National Education Law
- formed the National Education Policy Commission
- is going to form National Curriculum Committee soon
- The committee is responsible for review and approval of the curriculum

State Government
- Is developing and implementing plans
- starting curriculum development with ethnic literature and culture groups
- coordinating with ethnic literature and culture groups in recruiting qualified teachers of ethnic languages
COLLABORATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The roles of ethnic organizations in the State

Ethnic civil society organizations can be found everywhere in Myanmar and have a lot of experience in their ethnic literature and culture matters.

Ethnic organizations are involved in the following collaborations with the government:

- Developing State Language policy with organizations with technical expertise. They have submitted policy drafts to state governments.
- Selecting ethnic language teachers by Ethnic Literature and Culture groups
- Collaborating with government in curriculum development
RESULTS

Teaching

- Ethnic languages can now be taught as a subject, though unofficially and informally. They can be taught officially when the National Education Law can be fully implemented. But that won’t be MTB-MLE.

- Budget allocations are now made to provide community appointed teachers to teach ethnic languages. They receive allowances, but not salaries.

- Ethnic language teaching is coordinated with government. Community teachers are organized at grassroots.
GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Lack of trust among different groups at initial stages
- Difficult to bring together stakeholders with different views and interests
- Time constraints and competing priorities of participants, being unable to regularly participate
- Lack of clarity how to implement the law and who will take responsibility for what extent
- Very little experience and knowledge of Language Planning and Policy
- Negative perspective on feasibility of implementing Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education
CHALLENGES

Union Government

- Language policies are not approved yet
- Other sub-sector laws are being drafted and education reforms being implemented, therefore ethnic language education is not fully supported for implementation
- Cannot yet recruit and train ethnic Teachers systematically
- Cannot allocate budget adequately
- Cannot yet approve curriculum and timetable for teaching ethnic languages
- Cannot systematically collect data on and identify schools for teaching ethnic languages
CHALLENGES

State Government

- There is weak implementation of the law.
- Measures for implementation are mentioned in the law, but clearer and more specific actions are lacking by the law.
- It cannot yet collect systematically the data and information needed for teaching ethnic languages in ethnic areas and states.
NEED TO DO

State Government

- to systematically and accurately collect data on number of students, teachers and schools) and conduct research in the state
- to systematically calculate budget required for teaching ethnic languages
- to establish centers for teaching/learning material development and teacher trainings
- conduct Action Research on MTB-MLE for ethnic minorities to meet the needs in the State. We would like to invite international agencies to provide support.
Thank You!