

FOSTERING MULTILINGUALISM FOR INCLUSION IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: TRANSLATING POLICY DIALOGUE ON THE BANGKOK STATEMENT INTO ACTION

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM (Bangkok time), 25 February 2021 via Zoom



Background

The Asia-Pacific Region is home to half of the world's 7,117 living languages,¹ each embedded with unique expressions and emblematic of a diversity of peoples. While 40 per cent of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand,² progress has been made through mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) in early years of schooling, along with the concerted multilateral efforts toward a growing understanding of the importance of learning in mother languages. The [International Mother Language Day](#) (IMLD) expands upon these efforts, with its goal of promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

IMLD was approved at the 1999 UNESCO General Conference³ and has been celebrated globally since 2000. IMLD garnered further support when the United Nations General Assembly welcomed the proclamation of the day in 2002⁴ and, in 2007, called upon Member States to “promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples around the world.”⁵ The latter meeting was the same discussion in which 2008 was proclaimed as the International Year of Languages. A decade later, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2019 as the [International Year of Indigenous Languages](#) and 2022-32 as the [Decade of Indigenous Languages](#).

The theme for International Mother Language Day 2021, “Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society,” takes this further by recognising that multilingualism can advance inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals’ focus on leaving no one behind. This is particularly relevant considering the global trend toward increasingly multilingual landscapes where ethnic minority, migrant, national and international languages co-exist. As such, there is a need to enhance inclusion through collaborative initiatives, particularly as it relates to language in education.

The [Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion](#) was created during the 3rd high-level policy forum on multilingual education convened in parallel to “The Inclusion, Mobility and Multilingual Education Conference: Exploring the Role of Languages for Education and Development” on 25 September 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. This meeting follows a longstanding history of collaborative high-level discussions including but not limited to the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Suzhou Conclusions (2014), and the Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015 (2014).

¹ <https://www.ethnologue.com>

² Global Education Monitoring Report. (2016). If you don't understand, how can you learn? Policy Paper 24. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243713>

³ UNESCO. (1999). General Conference, 30, Approved programme and budget, 2000-2001. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000120679.page=184>

⁴ United Nations. (2002). General Assembly, 56, A/RES/56/262. <http://undocs.org/A/RES/56/262>

⁵ United Nations. (2007). General Assembly, 61, A/RES/61/266. <http://undocs.org/A/RES/61/266>

The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion emphasises the importance of multilingual education in achieving [the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Viewing people from all languages and cultures as valued citizens is essential in order to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development” (SDG 16). In multilingual environments, proficiency in more than one language is a prerequisite to decent work for the individual, and economic growth for the nation (SDG 8). However, children, youth and adults may not be able to build language proficiency if they lack understanding of the language used by teachers, textbooks and digital learning resources (SDGs 4.4, 4.6). In such cases, school language policies can act as barriers, preventing access to inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4) and thus exacerbating social inequality (SDG 10). With language(s) of instruction impacting learners at several key junctures,⁶ language policies at each level play an important role in creating a positive and inclusive learning environment, while fostering enduring peace (SDG 16), gender equality (SDG 4.5), and sustainable development (SDG 4.7).

While underscoring the role of multilingual education in achieving the 2030 SDGs, the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion recommends specific action items that educational stakeholders may adopt to address inequalities in language(s)-in-education policies and practices in their respective countries. The document calls for bridging the gap between research and practice through evidence-based policies on multilingual education in the following ways: 1) highlighting language(s)-of-instruction issues; 2) fostering investment for quality multilingual education; 3) enhancing the quality of multilingual education; 4) diversifying the teacher workforce and building teacher capacity; 5) gathering data disaggregated by home or first language; 6) strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders and partners; and 7) preparing national progress reports. This action plan works toward the realization of “inclusive and equitable quality education” (SDG 4) in relation to the language needs of all learners.

The second session of regional webinar series will focus on implementing the action plan items of the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion. Each panel speaker will provide various examples of mother tongue-based multilingual education programmes and language(s)-in-education policies that are congruent with the Bangkok Statement. As such, the webinar will create a dialogue among educational stakeholders within the Asia-Pacific region on how the Bangkok Statement can be helpful for government officials, policymakers, and practitioners. Additionally, this webinar will feature the launch of a guidance note on “Ensuring inclusive education for ethnolinguistic minority children in the COVID-19 era.”

Objectives

1. To raise awareness regarding the importance of MTB MLE to achieve inclusive education for all learners.
2. To understand practical policy and programme applications of the Bangkok Statement for fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society.
3. To catalyse multilateral engagement and cooperation in implementing MTB MLE programmes in the Asia-Pacific region.

Target Audience

The target audience for the webinar includes regional, national and international level education stakeholders (including both policymakers and implementers) interested in the applications of the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion for inclusive multilingual education policies and programmes.

⁶ These key junctures include early childhood education and school readiness (SDG 4.2), the transition to primary education (SDG 4.1), and carry-through into secondary, tertiary, vocational, and lifelong education of various forms (SDG 4.4).

Working Language

English will be the working language of the webinar.

Dates and Format

Date: Thursday, 25 February 2021

Time: 11:00am – 12:30pm (Bangkok time)

Format: Zoom

Registration

Registration is free and required in advance. Once you register, a unique join URL will be sent to your email.

Registration link: https://unesco-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_InmO4TuvR52KXBqtTcGPjA

For more Information

Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group Secretariat

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Agenda

Thursday, 25 February 2021	
Moderator: Mr. Kirk Person, Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group	
11:00am – 11:10am	Welcome and Introduction from the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group <ul style="list-style-type: none">• UNESCO Director-General's video message on International Mother Language Day• Welcoming Remarks by Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Bangkok
11:10am – 12:00pm	Panel Speakers (10 mins each): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia• Ethel Agnes P. Valenzuela, Director, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) "Equity Effects of Children's Background on Learning Opportunities"• Krai Yos Patrawart, Deputy Managing Director, Equitable Education Fund, Thailand "<i>Multilingualism and Equitable Education: A Case Study from the Homegrown Teacher Program in Thailand</i>"• Muhammad Zaman Sagar, Senior Advocacy Officer, Forum of Language Initiatives (FLI), Pakistan "<i>MTB-MLE in Pakistan: The Initiatives from the Communities, Challenges, and Way Forward</i>"• Joseph Lo Bianco, Professor Emeritus of Language and Literacy Education, University of Melbourne, Australia "<i>Towards Policy as an Implemented Reality</i>"
12:00pm – 12:15pm	Q&A and Discussion

12:15pm – 12:30pm

Key Messages, Guidance Note Launch, and Closing

- **Francisco Benavides**, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office