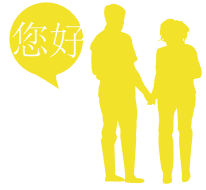




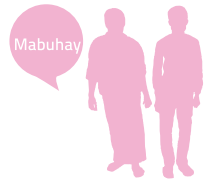
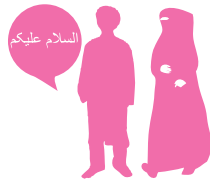
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Bangkok Office
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau
for Education



Language Matters

for the Millennium Development Goals



Language and the Millennium Development Goals

Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is not happening equitably. Many of the low-income communities in which more progress is needed live in complex language situations. Choosing the best language in which to engage with these marginalized communities is key to achieving the remaining MDGs.

In the most challenging contexts for the MDGs, many people do not speak a national or international language. Yet, when development initiatives in these contexts are implemented in people's first languages, communities often create appropriate, sustainable solutions. This briefing document outlines how the use of people's first languages helps communities choose appropriate solutions to make sustained progress towards each MDG.



**Goal 1:
Eradicate
Poverty and
Hunger**

Peoples' identities are formed by their language, culture and environment and the loss of any of these is frequently accompanied by large human and social costs. For example, linking with MDG 7, many non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities rely on seasonal crops, making them more susceptible to extreme poverty due to crop failures as a result of climate changes. The lack of information and services in non-dominant languages means that ethnolinguistic communities speaking these languages are often excluded from government services and other development interventions. Providing opportunities for these communities to become key actors in accessing such opportunities—in a familiar language and a culturally appropriate way—empowers them to make decisions that positively impact their overall wellbeing.

**Goal 2:
Achieve
Universal
Primary
Education**

Many children struggle at school when they are not taught in their first language. Evidence clearly shows that learning in one's first language is more effective. Mother tongue-based multilingual education encourages contextually relevant learning through the child's first language, while also allowing for the mastery of a national or international language in later years. Where instruction is conducted in the child's first language in the first years of school—and continues for as long as possible—it empowers the family and wider community to help support and encourage ongoing learning outside of the classroom, contributing to children staying in school longer and learning more.



Goal 3:
Promote
Gender Equality
and
Empower
Women

Boosting women's literacy and providing information and support in their first languages improves their economic position and impacts favourably on the way families bring up their children. For example, as women read about human trafficking, domestic abuse and other forms of maltreatment in a language they understand, they are empowered to take positive action. The same is true in the areas of health and economic independence, with direct positive implications for the whole families' wellbeing.

Goal 4 and 5:
Reduce Child
Mortality and
Improve Maternal
Health

Many non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities find language a major barrier to accessing health services. Lives can be saved through women receiving better information on nutrition, breastfeeding, medicine administration and how to prevent and treat infections. Women are better able to care for themselves and their family when they receive health information in a language that is familiar to them and in ways that are sensitive to their cultural context.

Goal 6:
Combat HIV
and AIDS, Malaria
and Other
Diseases

The stigma associated with diseases such as HIV/AIDS makes the way we communicate about them particularly important. Where people do not receive essential information in their first languages, in a culturally sensitive manner and from people they trust, they are particularly vulnerable to such diseases. Providing information in people's first languages helps to bridge the gap between receiving information and understanding it, and empowers people to make proactive choices that slow the spread of such diseases.



**Goal 7:
Ensure
Sustainable
Development**

Many regions of the world that are rich in natural resources and biodiversity are also areas of the greatest cultural and language diversity. Sustainable development must be based upon the participation of minority groups, many of who depend on healthy ecosystems for their survival and future. Development initiatives that do not use people's first languages limit the participation of non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities, resulting in the loss of significant local knowledge and experience about how to care for these unique ecosystems.

**Goal 8:
Foster Global
Partnerships
for Development**

Building global partnerships requires clear communication. Forcing people to communicate in a language they do not understand well limits their ability to participate in such networks. Information and communications technologies (ICT) in people's first languages allows this participation and assists in accelerating development across all MDGs, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and information otherwise not accessible and providing a tool to enhance partnership between sectors.





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Language, Education and Development (LEAD) Asia

Addressing questions around language and culture can be challenging and require specific expertise and experience. LEAD Asia is committed to helping see the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) realised for all people, whatever language they speak, and as such is willing to provide assistance to people or groups trying to consider questions around language and culture. To learn more about how to leverage the benefits of using peoples' first languages in development work visit: www.leadimpact.org

LEAD Asia is a unit of SIL International. SIL is a non-profit organization that has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is an official NGO partner of UNESCO with consultative status.

Asia Multilingual Education Working Group (MLEWG)

Asia Multilingual Education Working Group – consisting of UN partner agencies, relevant international NGOs, civil society organizations and academic institutions – was established in 2004 under the Regional Thematic Working Group on Education for All (EFA) to remove barriers of access to quality education for ethnolinguistic communities through the coordination of technical and substantive support to multilingual education initiatives and related policy advocacy throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

For further information, visit: www.asiapacificmle.net