

An International Conference on:

Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

November 9-11, 2010
Bangkok, Thailand

About the Conference

An international conference on "Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals" will be held on November 9-11 in Bangkok, Thailand sponsored by a consortium of organizations from the Asia Multilingual Education (MLE) Working Group, including: UNESCO, UNICEF, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), Mahidol University, SIL International, Save the Children, CARE International, Asia Pacific Basic and Adult Education, Asia Institute of Technology and the Royal Thai Institute.

With representatives of government and intergovernmental agencies, NGOs, academics and local civil society during the three-day forum the dialogue will focus on: the state of development of ethnolinguistic minorities, the relevance of local languages in achieving education and development goals, and the development of programs and policies that better reach these underserved groups.

Context

Despite aggregate gains worldwide in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA), the state of development for the world's ethnolinguistic minorities continues to lag behind, putting them at risk for even greater disparities that hinder efforts to overcome poverty, illiteracy and disease; as well as increasing the likelihood of conflict arising from exclusion.

The vast majority of planning, monitoring and evaluation for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All, however, makes minimal mention of ethnolinguistic minorities, even as they are disproportionately affected by many of the most pressing social challenges.

The global development community needs an intentional plan of action to address this disparity, including: strategies that integrate local languages and cultures into the development process for greater access and quality; data collection indicators and methodology that specifically disaggregate development gains to track the progress of ethnolinguistic minorities relative to their majority

counterparts; and mechanisms to enable greater participation and voice of ethnolinguistic minority communities in decision-making for development.

For ethnolinguistic minorities to be effectively included in global campaigns such as the Millennium Development Goals, awareness raising and capacity building is needed with the full spectrum of development actors (governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies and donor institutions) regarding the interrelationship between language, education and development, as well as strategies for including a strong focus on ethnolinguistic minorities in national education and development planning.

Background

Since 2004, the Bangkok-based Multilingual Education (MLE) Working Group has worked collaboratively to raise awareness regarding persistent inequalities in the educational attainment of ethnolinguistic minorities, and to promote good practices in increasing access and quality of education for these disadvantaged groups. A significant contribution of the working group has been in the hosting of two international conferences on topics related to multilingual education:

- Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Minority Communities in Asia, 6-8 November 2003, Thailand
- The 2nd International Conferences on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Ethnolinguistic Communities, 1-3 July 2008, Thailand

These first two conferences were highly successful, attracting representation from countries in Asia and around the world, thus raising the profile of multilingual education as essential to achieving inclusive education for all and the value of preserving minority languages as an integral part of intangible cultural heritage.

Recognizing that multilingual education is most relevant when strongly integrated with a broader framework of education, development and improved quality of life for ethnolinguistic minorities, the Multilingual Education (MLE) Working Group has selected the broad theme of "Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals" for the 2010 conference.

Conference Purposes

Languages are more than tools for communication; they help shape the identity of individuals and groups, as well as serving as a key element in social integration and cultural development. As such, languages are also strategically important for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA).

This **conference provides a forum to enhance understanding, inspire meaningful action and increase access to education and development opportunities for ethnolinguistic communities**, through:

- Increasing understanding of the linkages between language and achieving the MDGs and EFA
- Fostering connections among a broad set of actors to support activities that integrate language and education as crosscutting themes in achieving the MDGs and EFA

- Informing policy makers and development partners on good practices to effectively incorporate language and education into strategies and policies to achieve the MDGs and EFA

Conference Program Elements

Plenary Sessions:

The conference features three plenary speakers, one each day, that will speak to the overarching theme of effective integration of language and education in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All. There will be opportunities for question and answers from the conference participants.

Parallel Sessions with Thematic Tracks:

The conference features four thematic tracks, which incorporate *language* and *education* as crosscutting themes. Each track will feature papers and presentations selected in advance from among the conference participants to represent a broad range of viewpoints and that highlight relevant local, national or comparative research and practice related to the conference theme. The thematic tracks will occur in parallel sessions throughout the conference. The four thematic tracks include:

1. Language and Universal Primary Education (MDG 2)

- Linguistic and cultural considerations in strategies that seek to achieve universal primary education
- Access and retention of children speaking non-dominant versus dominant languages in primary education
- Role of learners' first language (L1) – or mother tongue – versus languages of wider communication (national, official or international languages) in primary education
- Multilingual education as a way towards universal primary education (UPE)
- Language in early childhood education and development: multilingual education to facilitate smooth integration into primary school;
- Relationship between adult literacy in L1 and UPE
- Effective integration of local language and culture into education policies and programs

2. Language and Gender Equality (MDG 3)

- Linguistic and cultural considerations in strategies that promote gender equality and empower women
- The role of life-long learning in overcoming gender biases and discrimination, including how life-long learning empowers both girls and boys, women and men
- Situation of women and girls in ethnolinguistic minority communities relative to their counterparts in dominant language speaking communities
- Ways that local language and culture have been integrated into policies and programs to ensure equitable development opportunities, improved status and treatment of both sexes

3. Language, Health, Nutrition and Protection (MDGs 4,5,6)

- Evidence and support for integrating local language and culture into policies and programs on health, nutrition and protection
- Providing equitable access to appropriate health and social welfare services for

- ethnolinguistic minority communities
- Utilizing language and culture to build good knowledge and practice for early childhood care and reproductive health
 - Linguistic and cultural strategies to minimize the impact of communicable diseases (i.e. HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria)
 - Professional social work practices across languages and cultures to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
 - Community-based mechanisms (e.g. diversion and restorative justice programs) to uphold the rights of children in ethnolinguistic minority communities

4. Language and Sustainable Development (MDGs 1,7)

- Linguistic and cultural considerations in poverty reduction and environmental preservation strategies
- Situation of ethnolinguistic minorities relative to dominant language populations with regard to alleviating extreme poverty and hunger, or in mitigating environmental degradation
- Role of life-long learning in alleviating poverty and stewardship of the environment
- Role of intangible cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge in sustainable development
- Ways that local language and culture have been integrated into policies and programs to facilitate equitable and sustainable development for speakers of non-dominant languages
- Drawing on language and culture to expand access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities

Exhibition:

Each day, there will be an open exhibition following lunch for organizations to have information tables to share about their organization's work and for participants to network.

Open Sessions:

In addition to the plenary sessions and parallel sessions, there will be a certain number of flexible, open sessions throughout the schedule to allow for things such as networking, affinity groups around particular topics, or extended Q&A with the speakers. More information will be available on these open/flexible sessions closer to the conference date.

Date and Venue

Date: November 9-11, 2010

Venue: **The Twin Tower Bangkok Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand**

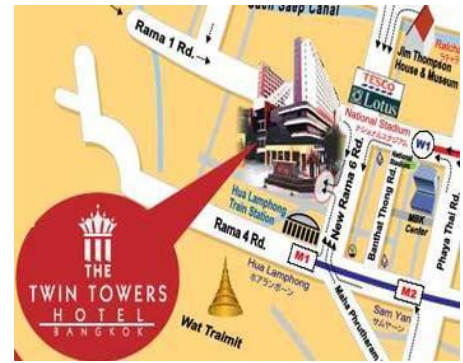
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Target Audiences

- National government officials responsible for developing policies related to indigenous peoples and sustainable development from Asian countries.
- National planning boards throughout Asia involved in strategy development for achieving EFA and the MDGs in their country context.
- Non-governmental organizations, academicians, and intergovernmental and multilateral agencies involved in research, advocacy or program implementation contributing to fulfillment of the MDGs. Multilateral and bilateral donor agencies that are mobilizing and allocating resources for achieving the MDGs.
- Community based organizations and local civil society members representing an interest in language, education and development issues

For more information on the conference program, please visit or contact the following;

Website: <http://www.seameo.org/LanguageMDGConference2010>

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