

**Getting Started with Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education:
Laying the groundwork with communities and schools in the Philippines
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This paper outlines the efforts of Save the Children's South Central Mindanao Program Office (SCMP) to implement MB MLE intervention programs at the primary level in two provinces of Mindanao, where the three major languages are Ilonggo, Maguindanaoan and Tboli. Ilonggo is the lingua franca of the region, and English and Filipino are the languages of instruction.

Formative research conducted in 2007 found that although English and Filipino are the media of instruction, the children speak other languages outside the classroom and have trouble understanding and that, in some cases, the teachers are not proficient either in the media of instruction. Secondly, teaching methodology emphasizes rote learning, decoding rather than comprehension, and material irrelevant to local context. The teaching materials are in English and Filipino, inadequate in number and more for decoration than instruction. They contain themes involving national culture, but not local culture. In the community at large, among students and parents, there is an enduring belief that learning English is the key to success and as the students already know their mother tongue, there is no need to teach it at school.

From June 2009 to May 2010, fora and consultation meetings were organized with members of the community, parents, the barangay council members and tribal leaders. A Language Advisory Committee (LAC) was set up at regional/community levels, comprised of representatives from government bodies, educators and community members. The LAC led the way in adapting local themes into the national curriculum, developing alphabet primers and other reading materials in local languages, taught interactive, dynamic teaching strategies and developed an evaluation framework. The remaining major challenge, however, is the limited number of mother tongue speaking teachers. The existence of legislation sanctioning mother tongue-based primary education, however, makes it easier to add local elements and rituals into the existing national curriculum.