

## **Recent Development in Multilingual Education in Nepal** **Mr. Indresh Thakur (Tribhuvan University, Nepal)**

Despite its small size, Nepal is amazingly linguistically diverse. Various estimates exist, but many Nepali linguists estimate there are at least 130 spoken languages in the country. These trace their roots to the four great language families, ie Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic. There is one potential linguistic isolate, the *Kusunda* language.

Mother tongue education in Nepal started only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. According to the Constitution of that year, children of all ethnic or language group can acquire primary level education in their own language. *Nepali*, written in the Devanagari script, is the *official language of Nepal*.

In an Interim Three Years Plan of 2008, it was stated that children would be provided education in their mother tongue and a trilingual policy would be adopted in the education system.

**Efforts made by Nepal's Curriculum Development Center** thus far include: a) provision of local languages as a subject in the curriculum and carrying 100 marks in exams. b) books are being developed in different local languages and c) the CDC is actively involved in MLE project activities.

Five books for Grades 1-5 have been developed in the Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tamang, Limbu, Bantawa Rai, Chamling Rai, Sherpa, Gurung, Magar and Nepal Bhasha languages.

Books have also been developed for mainly younger grades in Sunuwar, Rajbansi, Tharu, Mugali, Yakka, Gumba Education (Bhot Bhasha) languages.

Reference materials have been developed in the following languages: Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Limbu, Tharu, Gurung, Magar, Doteli, Chamling, Thakali, Sanskrit and Nepal Bhasha.

There are books for grade 9 and 10 in Nepali, Maithili, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Urdu, Tibetan and Pali.

In total, the CDC has developed and distributed 123 books on mother tongue education.

**Efforts made by UNESCO Nepal include:** An advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: 'Including the Excluded' (published by UNESCO Bangkok) was translated into Nepali and became very popular. It was then translated into Maithili and Bhojpuri, the second and third most widely spoken languages of the country.

**Multilingual Education Program in Nepal;** This is jointly conducted by the Government of Nepal and the Government of Finland and began in January 2007. The program covers six districts, 7 pilot schools and eight languages.

Early activities included the identification and training of local level language experts, completion of a baseline survey, development of an action research plan and selection of pilot schools. Actors included a team of national experts, a team of international experts, staff from the Department of Education (DEO), the National Centre for Education Development (NCED), and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC); periodicals experts and school teachers.

Inputs were provided to national authorities through organising in-country seminars and training workshops; visits to pilot schools, reports on teacher training.

Outputs included; awareness raised in teachers of the pilot schools in using mother tongue (MT) in education; technical training in preparation of texts in mother tongue; MT reference books and guidelines; an MLE teacher training manual.

**Challenges for MLE;** It is still often only a 'slogan'. There is a lack of clarity in the current policies, ie whether there is a bilingual or multilingual approach. There is a lack of knowledge and skills in terms of curriculum and textbook developments; a lack of teachers in many languages, and a lack of script for many languages. There is little funding for developing and distributing curriculum and textbooks. Communities are reluctant to contribute to the development of MLE (the local language is seen as not beneficial for getting a job).

**In conclusion,** government policy should be more flexible. Communities should be supported to be involved in the development of teaching materials and promoting local languages both academically and managerially; there needs to be much more work in terms of curriculum and textbook development, language teacher development, and provision and dissemination of all kinds of resources.