

Making school systems multilingual: Moving from ‘Why’ to ‘How’.

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It is increasingly accepted that many children need to learn in their first language in order to progress through education, and that a lack of mother tongue-based education is linked to high school dropout levels and repetition, especially in rural areas. There is also strong evidence that children can learn other languages well through teaching which develops their first language and gradually introduces a second language.

However, many national school systems are set up to teach in just one national or international language; many others only use the child’s first languages for very short periods. There are tens or hundreds of first languages present in many countries. How is it possible to make large scale change towards multilingual education systems which respond to the linguistic diversity of children?

Save the Children is conducting participatory action research in Bangladesh, India and Viet Nam to better understand what contributes to the institutionalisation of mother tongue-based approaches in large education systems in Asia. The goal is to identify strategies to bring mother tongue-based and multilingual approaches into mainstream school systems, and to highlight key considerations to strengthen the replication and sustainability of future work.

This presentation shares the key findings and recommendations from the research. We hope that this research will add to the international knowledge base on minority education and second language teaching, and will be useful to agencies working on education reform programmes related to the language of instruction and to those focused on minority rights in education.