

**Multilingual Education in India:  
The rewards and hazards of large scale government programmes.**

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It is generally acknowledged that children who begin education in the language they are most familiar with have a greater chance of success within an education system. However, while there are many small-scale programmes, few governments of linguistically diverse nations have taken up the challenge of developing multilingual education (MLE) programmes on a large scale. For many the task is daunting, while for others political agendas and uninformed views hinder the development of good approaches.

The state governments of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa in India, with central government support under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA – Universal Elementary Education), have been developing MLE programmes in several tribal communities primary schools since 2003. With educational reviews recommending that MLE should be considered more widely and with the recent passing of the Right to Education Bill (2010) language can no longer be ignored.

This paper looks at the impact MLE has had at the local, state, and national levels; at the barriers encountered; and the challenges that remain. It examines what policy makers, educational planners and implementers might learn from the early development of MLE in India and what might be required for the further development of MLE within an education system. Many more governments are realizing the necessity of addressing language related concerns if the MDGs are going to be achieved, thus the lessons learned, recommendations and suggestions will be applicable to other nations with contexts that require similar responses.