



Save the Children



# Mother Language First

Sakango Amani Kok  
(KOKBOROK/TRIPURA)

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(MARMA)

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(CHAKMA)

Prothomré Gogoak' Katha  
(SANTAL)

Skangpa Ma·any Kue  
(ACHIK/GARO)

পরথমে মায়কের ভাষা  
(SADRI/ORAN)



Zabarang Kalyan Samity



Hill District Council  
Khagrachari

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(SADRI/ORAOON)

**Towards achieving EFA for Adivasi children  
in Bangladesh**

**Terry Durnnian**

**wki i ꠗ ꠗꠗꠗꠗꠗ**  
**children's action through education**

**Save the Children fights for children around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.**

**The International Save the Children Alliance is the world's leading independent children's rights organisation, with members in 27 countries and operational programmes in more than 100.**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

AITPN	Asian Indigenous Tribal People’s Network
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTRC	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
HDC	Hill District Council
ICEF	Indigenous Children’s Education Forum
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MLE	Multilingual Education
MoCHTA	Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NCTF	National Children’s Task Force
NGO	Non-government Organisation
PEDP II	Primary Education Development Programme II
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
SMC	School Management Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

## Executive summary

The Government of Bangladesh has committed itself to achieving Education for All (EFA) by 2015 and guaranteeing the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 1989). The commitment to meet the EFA goals stresses that all children have access to a *completely* free and compulsory primary education of good quality meaning that

...schools should accommodate *all children* regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, *children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities* and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994, restated in the EFA Dakar Framework for Action 2000

EFA means all children, not just the majority, but questions exist whether EFA will actually include Adivasi<sup>1</sup> children in Bangladesh. A member of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Regional Council felt that Education for All and MDG 2<sup>2</sup> could not be achieved in the CHT under current government policies and practices (TPP consultation, Khagrachari, 2005). The link between education in mother tongue and achieving EFA has been made by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO.

### Situation of Adivasi children and their education

In Bangladesh, most Adivasi children are disadvantaged by an education system that does not recognise their language or culture. As a result the majority of Adivasi children must enter school and be taught in a language they do not know or understand. They sit in classroom across Bangladesh struggling and not understanding anything the teacher says. The only other option of them is to stop attending school or drop out. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) the dropout rate for Adivasi children is much higher than the estimated national rate with more than 60 percent of children dropping out especially in the early years. (ADB, 2001)

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the terms 'Adivasi' and 'indigenous' are used as they are the terms with which these people self-identify.

<sup>2</sup> Universal Primary Education

Government and NGO reports have identified the challenges for Adivasi children in accessing and completing a quality education in Bangladesh especially in the recently, the Second Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP II) ‘Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children’ (MoPME, 2006). These problems can be grouped into four main areas: lack of access, poor quality, cultural inappropriateness and lack of local control and involvement. They are profoundly interrelated.” (ISG, 2006:51). The crucial issue is language.

#### Poor access

- Discrimination by teachers from enrolling due to poor Bangla language skills
- Inflexibility of the school calendar, which does not reflect local conditions
- Lack of schools in Adivasi areas, low coverage by education system, less than 60% (ADB, 2001)

#### Poor quality

- Schools fail to recognise specific learning needs of Adivasi children
- Insufficient number of primary teachers from Adivasi community; no specific recruitment policy
- Posting of teachers does not take into account ethnicity of teachers and host community
- Schools in Adivasi areas receive less government support – poorer repair

#### Cultural inappropriateness

- Language of instruction is not the mother tongue of children,
- Curriculum does not reflect local culture, values, and language
- Education system does not recognise the strength in diversity for future development – local, national and international

#### Lack of local control

- Parents less involved in schools where teachers do not speak mother tongue
- Limiting effect on language and cultural development
- Parents see less value in education not linked to culture and language

### **Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE)**

Mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MLE) is education, formal or non-formal, in which the children’s mother tongue and Bangla are used in the classroom.

The strategy of *mother tongue-based MLE* recognises the importance of children beginning their education in their mother tongue (*mother language first*) - the language they speak and understand. Local community ownership, local teachers, and an appropriate and relevant curriculum are also important elements of a successful mother tongue-based MLE programme.

Children begin their education in a language they understand, their mother tongue, and develop a strong foundation in it. After developing this strong foundation in their mother tongue, children then begin to learn Bangla as a second language. Evidence has shown (Benson, 2006) that education in mother tongue increases the enrolment and attendance of Adivasi girls.

As a result, mother tongue-based multi-lingual education will produce better and more successful learners who are bilingual, biliterate and bicultural (Malone, 2005).

**Bilingual:** Learners are confident and comfortable using their mother tongue and Bangla in everyday interactions and learning.

**Biliterate:** Learners are able to read and write their mother tongue and Bangla fluently. They have access to more information and more opportunities in lives.

**Bicultural:** Learners develop a better understanding of their own culture and community as well as Bengali culture and community. They are confident and comfortable interacting with people from outside their community.

MLE would enable the Government of Bangladesh to achieve its goals under EFA and the Millennium Development Goal 2 – Universal Primary Education. So that in Bangladesh, EFA includes all children including the most marginalized – Adivasi children. A World Bank report states – “First language instruction results in (i) increased access and equity, (ii) improved learning outcomes, (iii) reduced repetition and dropout rates, (iv) sociocultural benefits and (v) lower overall costs.” (World Bank, 2005:2)

### **Steps forward**

Under current government plans and strategies, an opportunity does exist to ensure Adivasi children enjoy the right to a quality basic education (pre-primary and

primary) in their mother tongue. The national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and PEDP II ‘Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children’ recognise language as a ‘crucial’ issue in promoting education, access and quality, for Adivasi children. Both recommend education in children’s mother tongue. In the context of the CHT, the Peace Accord (1997) and the Rangamati Declaration (1998) identifies primary education in children’s mother tongue as a priority.

But, to date no concrete actions have been taken on these recommendations by the government. The success of these strategies will depend on the interest and will of the government to ensure the full educational rights of Adivasi children.

Some initial steps are:

1. Recognition by the Government of mother tongue-based multilingual education as an effective strategy to ensure quality primary education for Adivasi children under PEDP II. As well as a better method for Adivasi children to acquire Bangla language skill than the current method of submersion in Bangla.
2. Recognition of children’s right to education in their mother tongue at pre-primary and primary levels of education. The mother tongue is the medium of instruction.
3. Support by the government and donors for mother tongue-based multilingual education initiatives in the formal and non-formal primary education systems in line with national strategies such as the PRS, PEDP II and the National Action Plan for EFA
4. Wider awareness and understanding of MLE by government, NGOs, donors and communities through the sharing of lessons learnt and experiences from MLE initiatives being implemented in Bangladesh and the region, supported by NGOs and local communities.
5. Government identify elements of current MLE initiatives that can be incorporated in the formal education system and acts upon them.
6. Dissemination and implementation in practice of PEDP II ‘Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal

Children' in partnership with local leaders and the Hill District Councils (HDCs).

7. Involvement of the Hill District Councils in national education planning as it relates to the Chittagong Hill Tracts districts so that all children in the CHT benefit from national education initiatives such as PEDP II.
8. The Primary Teachers Institute in Rangamati establishes training courses and programmes in multilingual education and Bangla as a second language.

I will be regular and enjoy my classes in school if the teacher teaches me in Tripura [mother tongue].

*Barun, aged 8, class 3 student, Khagrachari Hill District*

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values,

*Article 29 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by the Government of Bangladesh, 1991*

5.408 The following actions have to be taken in improving the situation of adivasi/ethnic minority people:

- Full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord (1997).
- It is necessary to provide education to adivasi/ethnic minority people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at primary level.

*Unlocking the Potential - National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction, (2005:152-153)*

19. The medium of instruction for 1-2 grades will be in the local language.

*Appendix H Summary of Indigenous People' Development Framework of PEDP II*

1. Children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue or, where this is not practicable, in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong.
2. Provision shall be made for a progressive transition from the mother tongue or the vernacular language to the national language or to one of the official languages of the country.

*Article 23, ILO Convention 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations (1957), ratified by the Government of Bangladesh, 1971*

# Adivasi children and their education

The choice of the language ... is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education ... Speakers of mother tongues, which are not the same as the national or local language, are often at a considerable disadvantage in the educational system ... (UNESCO, 2003:14)

## Introduction

In 1971 the people of Bangladesh won a war of independence in which the right to language was a catalyst. Many Adivasi fought in the independence struggle. Since the war of independence no one has questioned Bangladeshis' right to their language. But, unfortunately, not all Bangladeshi children enjoy the right to education in their mother tongue/language. Whereas, Bengali children attend school in their mother tongue, Bangla; the vast majority of Adivasi children are not able to realise this right. Instead, they must enter school and learn in a language that they do not know or understand.

Benson (Benson, 2006:1) argues that language is the principle mechanism through which inequality in society is replicated. A clear example is the medium of instruction, which language is used and which is not used. In order to make education more inclusive for all children especially girls, the use of children's mother tongue as the medium of instruction is crucial.

The current marginalization of Adivasi children by the education system contributes to an estimated 55.5 percent of Adivasi children aged 6-10 not enrolled in school. (Titumir & Hossain, 2004) In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) the dropout rate for Adivasi children is much higher than the estimated national rate with more than 60 percent of children dropping out especially in the early years. (ADB, 2001) Though language is not the only factor in contributing to the marginalization of Adivasi children, it is a significant one compounding the inequality within the society. Other

important contributing facts are curriculum which is unrelated to children's lives and culture and the lack of local involvement and management of schools.

The problems faced by Adivasi children in Bangladesh can be grouped into four main areas: lack of access, poor quality, cultural inappropriateness and lack of local control and involvement. "They are profoundly interrelated." (ISG, 2006:51). 'Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children' (MoPME, 2006) identified similar constraints and difficulties for achieving the education rights of Adivasi children in Bangladesh. These areas are discussed below.

### **Lack of access**

As mentioned Adivasi children have lower enrolment rates, receive fewer years of schooling and complete school in smaller numbers than majority Bengali children. The enrolment rates for Adivasi children are well below the estimated national average of 80 percent. Rates differ between specific Adivasi communities with some having a higher enrolment and others quite low. It is estimated that 44.5 percent of Adivasi children aged 6-10 years in Bangladesh are enrolled in primary education. Only Chittagong Division has more Adivasi children enrolled (53 percent) than out-of-school (Titumir & Hossain, 2004). In consultations, children felt that Adivasi children do not have access to primary education because teachers and school administrators deny them admission since they often do not speak fluent Bangla (Save the Children, 2004).

Most Adivasi communities are located in more remote areas, separate from Bengali communities due to negative socio-religious attitudes and open discrimination. This also means they are farther from government schools. The availability of schools is an issue. This is especially true in the Chittagong Hill Tracts where the average coverage by the government primary education system is much lower than the national average, less than 60 percent (ADB, 2001). As a result a large percentage of Adivasi children never enrol due to a lack of availability of schools within appropriate walking distance. An appropriate distance (2 km as defined by the government) in the plains areas is different from an appropriate distance in very hilly or marshy areas. Difficult terrain makes the journey much longer and potentially unsafe. In the CHT due the militarization of the area, some schools were moved to be more accessible to roads and to the military. At the same time the schools became less accessible to children, being farther from their homes.

Another issue is the national school year calendar which does not reflect local traditions, culture and way of life. During Jhum cultivation in the CHT, most parents prefer to take their children with them to the Jhum fields. During this period the children do not attend school and miss out on education as the school calendar does not recognise seasonal events such as Jhum cultivation. The school calendar needs to be flexible based on local conditions and local way of life. In this way children are not discriminated against and excluded by the education system due to it.

The dropout rate for Adivasi children in the CHT is also much higher than the estimated national average as more than 60 percent of children drop out especially in the early years (ADB, 2001). The percentage of Adivasi children who complete a full basic education is far less than other children in Bangladesh.

### **Poor quality**

The education that Adivasi children receive is of a lesser quality than other children in Bangladesh receive through the primary education system. Quality education is an education that is:

1. *relevant* (to children's needs, context now and the future),
2. *appropriate* (to children's abilities, language, culture and potential),
3. *participatory* (to able children, families to play a full role in the process of learning and the organisation of the school),
4. *flexible* (to respond to different and changing contexts in which children live – environmental, economic, social developments and realities),
5. *inclusive* (accessible to all, all children active in their learning and play, seeing diversity and differences between children as a resources to support learning and play),
6. *protective* (from exploitation, abuse, violence and conflict)<sup>3</sup>.

The education system has failed to recognise the specific learning needs of Adivasi children, especially education in their mother tongue. As a result schools are providing an education that is not relevant, appropriate, flexible or inclusive.

Currently an insufficient number of primary teachers from Adivasi communities exist within the formal education system. Often qualified Bengali teachers do not

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<sup>3</sup> Save the Children define 'quality' education in these six components.

want to be posted to remote Adivasi areas so they rent their teaching position to an unqualified person who may or may not show up at the school. Bengali teachers also do not know Adivasi languages so they are unable to communicate with Adivasi children in their classroom.

The government system of posting teachers does not take into consideration the ethnicity of the teacher or of the host communities. “There are 27 teachers in Netrokona district from the [Adivasi] community, but they are often not assigned to their own community schools.” (MoPME, 2006:6). A CARE Bangladesh reports describes the similar situation.

The main problem with the access to education in remote areas is that it is difficult to find teachers to go to the postings. Teachers are not employed from the locality. There are problems when teachers from one tribal/indigenous community are posted to a school in a village of another community. Language is a barrier in education in the CHT. Many of the tribal languages are distinct from each other and Bengali. This means that the children find it difficult to learn in a language other than their mother tongue. (CARE, 1999 in AITPN, 2003:36)

Due to the remoteness of schools that serve Adivasi communities, the lack of government interest and the lack of community involvement, school buildings in Adivasi areas tend to be in poor repair (MoPME, 2006). “[T]he schools are run down or non-existent and many of the teachers are absent or have never actually visited the schools.” (AITPN, 2003:36). Questions exist whether any of the new classrooms and repairs planned under PEDP II, have benefited Adivasi communities.

### **Cultural inappropriateness**

Government and NGO research have identified the lack of mother tongue instruction as a major barrier to the learning of Adivasi children. (MoPME, 2006; BRAC, 2004; ISG, 2006). The vast majority of Adivasi children enter primary school not understanding or speaking Bangla, the national language. Barun’s story in Case Study 1 illustrates this problem.

### Case study - Barun

Barun, aged 8, is currently in class three at a non-formal primary school in Khagrachari district. He is from the Tripura ethnic community. His father is a Jhum cultivator and his mother is a housewife.

In 2004, he started at a non-formal primary school. There is only one female teacher from the Marma community. All the books in his class are in Bangla and lessons are also taught in Bangla. From the very beginning, Barun did not understand the teacher's lessons and class books because until now he had only spoken Tripura at home and had no exposure to Bangla.

If Barun did not understand the teacher's question, he would reply that he did not know the answer. This often led to the teacher punishing him by pulling his ear. It would be helpful for Barun to have his lessons in his native language, Tripura (or Kohborok).

Barun says, "I will be regular and enjoy my classes in school if the teacher teaches me in Tripura".

Mr Chandar Kishor Tripura, a head teacher of a government primary school in Khagrachari district explained that "all children when they enter grade 1 do not speak or understand Bangla and admits that this is a problem for them. Not understanding what is being taught contributes to a high drop out and poor attendance in most schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts." (Islam, 2006:25). As Bangla is the official language of instruction, they must sit in class, not understanding what the teacher is saying. The only other option for the children is to not attend or drop out.

Some teachers are trying to use the children's mother tongue in the classroom but only in a limited way as they lack the skills and confidence to use their own language. "Though teachers feel obligated to use Bangla in the classroom since it is the official language, they do use the children's mother tongue to explain ideas or instruction" (Islam, 2006:25).

Based on examples from Asia, Benson (2005), identified a positive correlation between girls' enrol and language of instruction. "More girls enrol in school when

they can learn in a language that is familiar to them.” (Benson, 2005:7) Girls in mother tongue-based multi-lingual education programmes stay in school longer and learn better as the classroom environment is less threatening and more supportive.

By not developing literacy skills in their mother tongue first, Adivasi children have greater difficulty in learning Bangla. When a child enters school, she or he must struggle to learn to understand, read and write Bangla. A child takes two to three years to learn enough Bangla, so that he or she can advance academically in school. The lack of fluency in Bangla of Adivasi children in class and “their lack of understanding due to language difference [are falsely] interpreted as evidence of their limited academic abilities and achievements [by teachers and schools]” (ICEF, 2006:16).

Though the government agreed to mother tongue primary education in the 1997 Peace Accord (Article 33 b), it has made no efforts to implement such education in the CHT to date. Primary education is a transferred department to the Hill District Councils, under the Peace Accord (1997).

In 2003 the Hill Students Council submitted a list of demands to the Prime Minister’s Office requesting the introduction of “primary education in the mother tongue of the indigenous peoples, to delete “derogatory remarks” against their national identity from the textbooks, ... to include “real political history” of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in textbooks and also the history of all indigenous peoples of the country.” (AITPN, 2003:36). No action has been taken to date. A similar request for education in mother tongue was given to the Prime Minister in Khagrachari by the National Children’s Task Force in 2006. To be relevant education needs to be based on the ‘place’ of the children and community – their lives, language, culture, and concerns.

The lack of mother tongue instruction is one indication of the inappropriateness of the primary education curriculum as it relates to Adivasi children. The Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Network report describes:

[T]he curriculum is prepared for the [non-Indigenous] Bengali plains. As part of the government’s overall scheme to bring indigenous people’s culture into the mainstream, the curriculum is entirely oriented to the dominant Bengali model, allowing no space for the religious values, ideas and aspirations of hill tribal culture.

Conformity to the Bengali ‘norm’ lies at the heart of the lessons, which are themselves communicated by approximately 95% Bengali teachers, with some schools having no indigenous teachers at all. (AITPN, 2003:36)

Adivasi people want their language, stories, and lives reflected in their education. As the research by ICEF (2006) states, “[f]ailure to engage indigenous students in meaningful ways results in classroom experiences that are incomprehensible and culturally invalidating. The result is that indigenous children often lose interest, underperform and drop out, and remain trapped in conditions of deprivation and marginalization.” (ICEF, 2006:22)

### **Lack of local control / involvement**

As government schools and their curriculum do not reflect Adivasi cultural values and language, parents do not find it relevant to their communities or livelihoods. This was identified in the recent government strategy for Adivasi children (MoPME, 2006). Often when reports state that parents are not aware of the importance of education; in reality, parents’ lack confidence in the education system and the quality and value of its lessons. International evidence has shown that parents are less likely to feel school is important and send their child to school if school is conducted in a language that the child and parents do not understand.

By not teaching and using children’s mother tongue in school, local interest and participation in education is limited. At the same time an attempt is being made to limit Adivasi language and culture over the long term. “The destruction of language and culture in schools is also highly counter-productive for the host society itself. In an era of globalization, a society that has access to multilingual and multicultural resources is advantaged in its ability to play an important social and economic role on the world stage.” (Cummins, 2000:3) As pointed out by Cummins (2000), it is in the best interest of the nation’s society to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism as it is directly linked to economic and social development of the country as a whole.

## Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE)

In Bangladesh Adivasi children and community want the choice of primary education in their mother tongue. As Barun, a class 3 Tripura student, stated; “I will be regular and enjoy my classes in school if the teacher teaches me in Tripura [my mother tongue]”.

Mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MLE) in Bangladesh would increase enrolment and completion of primary education for Adivasi children. The positive impact of MLE has been documented in countries such as India, Cambodia and Thailand. A World Bank report supports this – “First language instruction results in (i) increased access and equity, (ii) improved learning outcomes, (iii) reduced repetition and dropout rates, (iv) sociocultural benefits and (v) lower overall costs.”(World Bank, 2005:2)

MLE will enable the Government of Bangladesh to achieve its goals under EFA and the Millennium Development Goal 2 – Universal Primary Education. So that in Bangladesh EFA includes *all* children including the most marginalized – Adivasi children.

### What is mother tongue-based MLE?

Mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MLE) is education, formal or non-formal, in which the children’s mother tongue and Bangla are used in the classroom. Children begin their education in a language they understand, their mother tongue, and develop a *strong foundation* in their mother language.

This strong foundation in the mother language provides a *good bridge* to learning a second language, Bangla, more effectively (Malone, 2005). “The level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development. Children who [have] ... a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop strong literacy abilities in their school language [Bangla].” (Cummins, 2000:4)

A strong education foundation

- ... begins in the language the learners know best, their mother tongue;
- ... builds on the knowledge and experience they bring to the classroom, and
- ... encourages them to gain confidence in themselves in learners

A good bridge

- ... enables the learners to gain competence and confidence
- ... in using the new language(s) [Bangla] for communication and learning
- ... without forcing them to abandon their [mother] language and culture  
(Malone, 2005:4)

### **Benefits of mother tongue-based MLE**

Through mother tongue-based MLE, the constraints and difficulties that Adivasi children face in realising their education rights, can be effectively addressed by basing education on the culture, language and living environment of Adivasi people. “[P]lace roots individuals in the social and cultural soils from which they have sprung together, holding them there in the grips of a shared identity, a localized version of selfhood ... [S]elfhood and placehood are completely intertwined” (Basso, 1996 in Gruenewald, 2003:626). Education recognises the identity of Adivasi people reflecting their social and cultural values.

As a result, mother tongue-based multi-lingual education will produce better and more successful learners who are bilingual, biliterate and bicultural (Malone, 2005).

Bilingual: Learners are confident and comfortable using their mother tongue and Bangla in everyday interactions and learning.

Bilingual children perform better in school when the school effectively teaches the mother tongue and ... develops literacy in that language. By contrast, when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and, consequently, its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined.  
(Cummins, 2000:5)

Biliterate: Learners are able to read and write their mother tongue and Bangla fluently. They have access to more information and more opportunities in lives.

More than 150 research studies conducted during the past 35 years strongly support ... [that t]he person who knows only one language does not truly know that language. The research suggests that bilingual ... [and biliterate] ... children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. (Cummins, 2000:4)

Bicultural: Learners develop a better understanding of their own culture and community as well as Bangla culture and community. They are confident and comfortable interacting with people from outside their community.

### **Steps in developing MLE at pre-primary and primary levels**

In a mother tongue-based MLE programme, you begin on the first step with children building their confidence and fluency in the oral mother tongue (speaking). “In her examination of language and early literacy in the preschool years, Snow (1993:228) notes that teachers [should] give students an ‘oral preparation for literacy.’” (Poulon, no date:18)

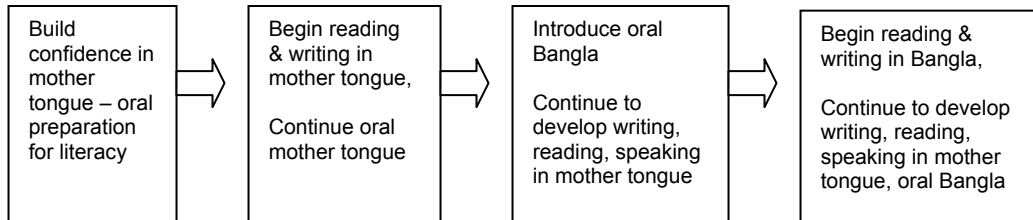
Based on the foundation of oral language, children begin to read and write in their mother tongue and continue to develop oral mother tongue skills. Literacy activities must be meaningful to children linking them to their oral language.

“By making a close connection between children’s oral language and what they read and write, it becomes easier for children who have not had extensive exposure to print to see print can be a representation of speech.” (Hamayan, 1993:293 in Poulon, no date:19)

With this strong foundation in mother tongue, Bangla (second language) is introduced orally in the classroom. Children develop confidence and fluency in oral Bangla while continuing to develop their oral and written skills in their mother tongue.

In the next step, children begin to read and write Bangla. At the same time, children continue to build their skills in reading, writing and speaking their mother tongue

and spoken Bangla. After this, a third language could be introduced such as English. (Malone, 2005). The diagram below illustrates this transition.



This progression from developing skills and knowledge (*strong foundation*) in mother tongue to developing skills and knowledge (*good bridge*) in Bangla is presented in a possible model below based on the formal education system.

**Table 2: Progression of language skill development in pre-primary and primary education**

<b>P-5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to develop skills in mother tongue – reading, writing and speaking;</li> <li>▪ Continue to develop skills in Bangla – reading, writing and speaking</li> </ul>
<b>P-4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduce English (possible);</li> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in mother tongue – reading, writing and speaking;</li> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in Bangla – reading, writing and speaking</li> </ul>
<b>P-3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in mother tongue – reading, writing and speaking;</li> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in Bangla – reading, writing and speaking</li> </ul>
<b>P-2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in mother tongue – reading, writing and speaking;</li> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in Bangla– reading, writing and speaking</li> </ul>
<b>P-1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue developing skills in mother tongue – reading, writing and speaking;</li> <li>▪ Continue developing oral Bangla</li> <li>▪ Introduce reading &amp; writing in Bangla (or preferably in P-2); -Bangla as a second language</li> </ul>
<b>K-2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduce reading &amp; writing in mother tongue;</li> <li>▪ Continue developing oral skills in mother tongue;</li> <li>▪ Introduce some oral Bangla</li> </ul>
<b>K-1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oral mother tongue, pre-reading &amp; writing skills in mother tongue</li> </ul>

K = pre-primary; P = primary class



If a language does not have orthography, orthography will need to be developed or adapted from an existing one. “The goal is that the orthographies will be acceptable to the mother tongue speakers of each language and to the relevant government agencies.” (Malone, 2005:11). NGOs and academic agencies in Bangladesh can provide support to communities and government in this process. The process of developing or choosing an orthography must be an inclusive and participatory one, in which community members and language speakers are part of the final decision.

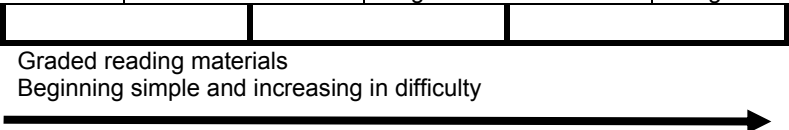
## 2. Graded reading materials in mother tongue and Bangla

In order for learners to develop fluency in reading in their mother tongue and then in Bangla, it is important that they have a variety of reading materials in both languages. Reading materials in pre-primary and lower primary should begin with short and simple sentences made up of three or four words and increase with the class and ability of the children to more complex and longer reading materials. Reading material should be based on familiar stories, places and activities to the children.

The graph below describes the four stages of reading materials as described by Malone (2005) for mother tongue and second language (Bangla) learning.

**Table 3: Four stages of reading materials**

Stage 1 Materials	Stage 2 Materials	Stage 3 Materials	Stage 4 Materials
For learning to read mother tongue	For gaining fluency in reading mother tongue	For transferring to Bangla (second language) from mother tongue	For life-long reading in mother tongue and Bangla


  
Graded reading materials  
Beginning simple and increasing in difficulty

(Malone, 2005:13)

Reading materials should be:

- Interesting to the learners, linked to their known community, culture
- Language is clear and understandable
- Pictures relate clearly to the text

- Picture and text - clear, large, colourful

Adivasi communities have a wealth of traditional stories, rhymes and poems from which to draw upon for creating reading materials. Children can write their own stories for other children to read.

3. Relevant teaching and learning materials/curriculum – *relevant to the people's language, community, and culture specific*

The national curriculum and learning outcomes need to allow and support education in Adivasi children's mother tongue and reflect the culture and values of Adivasi communities. This is not simple translating existing curriculum but adapting it to the context of Adivasi communities – their culture, language and values. This process should be done in consultation with Adivasi leaders for they are the experts of their language and culture.

Relevant teaching and learning materials need to be developed based on the context of the Adivasi communities and national learning outcomes. Learning materials should build on the knowledge and experience that children bring to school – learning based on the known. In Poulson (no date) she stresses the negative impact on children if learning is not based on the known.

[W]hen students' language, culture and experiences are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning; there are few points of connection to curriculum materials or instruction and so students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. (Cummin, 2000:2 in Poulson, no date: 7)

Children being able to use the knowledge and skills they bring from home in their learning helps them become better learners. Also by valuing their knowledge and skills in the classroom, you are valuing their culture and language – their identity as Adivasi people within Bangladesh.

4. Recruitment and training of local teachers in active learning

As it has been noted in several studies and strategies on Adivasi children and their education (MoPME, 2005; BRAC, 2004; ICEF, 2006) the recruitment and training of local teacher who speak the language of the children is essential. Teachers also must have the support and confidence to speak their mother tongue with children in the classroom. When children can talk with teacher in their own language, children are more confident and learn better, especially girls. Evidence has shown that teachers who can speak the language of the children treat all children, especially girls more fairly in the classroom.

This does mean that the system of recruiting and posting teachers within the government system needs to adapt to the needs of Adivasi communities which has been proposed under PEDP II. The system needs to support more Adivasi people to become teachers in their home areas. This is a more resource efficient way of ensuring locally relevant teaching and learning.

Parents also become more involved in the life of the school and their children’s education when they can discuss issues with teachers in their own language and understand the relevancy of the lessons to their culture and community.

These teachers need to be trained effective so that they can create a child-friendly learning environment in the classroom and school for all children to actively participate in their learning. School should be welcoming. Teachers need to ensure that all children are involved in lessons – ask questions, discuss their ideas, work with other children and use the community as learning resource. Teachers should ensure children are safe from teasing, bullying and discrimination in the school and classroom – by adults and other children.

##### 5. Community awareness and involvement

Adivasi communities need information about the purpose and benefits of mother tongue-based MLE. Successful mother tongue-based multi-lingual education programmes are based on strong community support from parents and local leaders. The importance of community participation has been highlighted in the PEDP II.

An important area of involvement for Adivasi parents is the School Management Committee (SMC). The PEDP II strategy for Adivasi children (PEDP II, 2005) recognises the importance of community participation and the fact that Adivasi “parents almost have no participation in School Management Committees”

(MoPME, 2006:9). Parents will participate more in school when they can speak their own language with teachers and head teachers. When establishing a mother tongue-based MLE programme, parents, children and community members need to be involved in the development, implementation, and management of such a programme.

Adivasi people need to be aware of the value and importance of education in their mother tongue as a way of enhancing their own language and culture and as a more effective way of acquiring language skills in Bangla.

#### 6. Awareness raising at district and national levels

Unless officials at the school, upazila and district levels need to understand the value and benefits of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education for children, they will not support efforts to develop such programmes in their schools. Head teachers, upazila education officials, district primary education officials, and Hill District chairpersons need to be involved in the process of establishing a mother tongue-based multi-lingual education programme.

In the CHT, primary education is the responsibility of the Hill District Councils. Their awareness and capacity especially needs to be developed under this unique system of local governance. The government needs to recognise this responsibility when developing and implementing national primary education plans such as PEDP II in the CHT.

At the nation level, officials in the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA) need to be aware of the benefits of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education. By demonstrating the value of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education, a more supportive political environment can be created. The MoPME and DPE need to view mother tongue-based multi-lingual education as an effective method of achieve its MDG and EFA goals in Adivasi areas and its objectives under PEDP II in the areas of inclusive education, bottom-up planning and community participation in the education system.

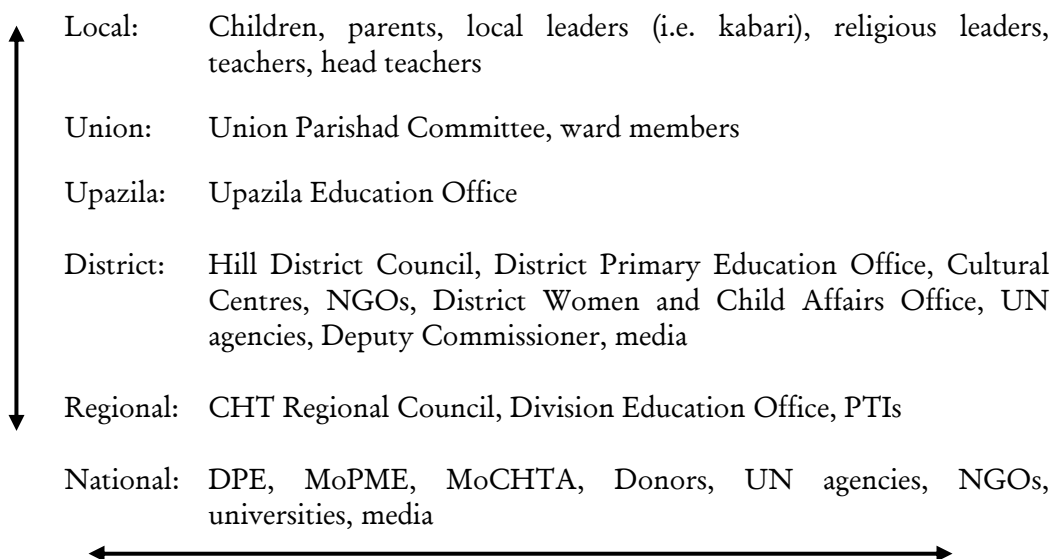
#### 7. Supportive political environment

Bangladesh lacks clear policies and directives in regard to ‘language and education’ so that mother tongue-based multi-lingual education can be initiated in government schools. Education in mother tongue is mentioned in several government agreements and strategies – nationally and internationally, but no firm actions have been taken by the government to implement them to date. This is discussed more in the next section.

Successful mother tongue-based multi-lingual programmes need strong political support at the nation level so that it can become a part of Bangladesh’s strategy for achieving EFA for all children. Within the CHT, the CHT Regional Council and the Hill District Councils need to strongly support these programmes for them to be successful and sustainable.

8. Cooperation amongst supporting agencies (*government at all levels, schools, NGOs, donor, community leaders, cultural associations, parents, children, religious institutions, Primary Teachers Institutes (PTIs), universities and media*)

To develop a successful mother tongue-based multi-lingual programme, all stakeholders must be actively involved and supporting it cooperatively. It is not something one person or agency can do alone. Cooperation need to happen at *all* levels – local, district, national and international. Some of the key stakeholders that need to work together are:



## Adivasi people in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse country with more than 45 unique and rich ethnic groups of which Bengalis are the largest, making up the majority to the population, approximately 98 percent. The remaining 2 percent of the population are made up a rich tapestry of minority ethnic groups. Though these groups identify themselves as Adivasi or indigenous, the terms ‘minority ethnic’, ‘Adivasi’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘tribal’ are used interchangeably within documents and literature in Bangladesh.

In the recently approved “Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children” (MoPME, 2006), they are called tribal; whereas in the final version of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Government of Bangladesh, 2005), the Government has used the term adivasi/ethnic minority. In her 2004 message to the indigenous peoples on the occasion of United Nations International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh used the term ‘indigenous’ peoples. In this document the terms ‘Adivasi’ and ‘indigenous’ are used as they are the terms with which these people self-identify.

### Location of Adivasi communities

In Bangladesh a strong link exists between language and socio-geographic and marginality. Most Adivasi people live in remoter areas of Bangladesh along the border regions of the country, primarily in North Bengal (western Rajshahi Division), Greater Mymensingh (northern Dhaka Division, Greater Sylhet (northeast and southeast of Sylhet Division), and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Chittagong Division which has the highest population of Adivasi peoples. In the CHT over 50 percent of the population is Adivasi. As well as being more remote and isolated, Adivasi communities are separate from Bangla ones, socially and culturally.

The actual population of Adivasi people in Bangladesh is unclear as the 2001 national census did not include any space or column in the form for collecting data on indigenous issues. The 1991 census did collect data on Adivasi people and gave the total population of Adivasi people as approximately 1.2 million. The accuracy of this

total is questioned as only 27 groups were identified - some indigenous communities were mentioned twice and others were not included.

Nevertheless, using a national average annual growth rate between the censuses, 1991 to 2001, of 1.48 percent, the population of Adivasi people could be estimated at 1.8 million in 2001. The Bangladesh Adivasi Forum claims that the population is higher, at approximately 3 million. The recent study by BRAC (Rafi, 2006) stated that Adivasi households make up 1.5 percent of the total households in Bangladesh. The actual population is not known.

**Table 1: Location of Adivasi people in Bangladesh**

Location	Adivasi Communities		
Greater Mymensingh (Mymensingh, Tangail, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Sherpur districts)	Garos Hajongs Kochs	Barman Dalus Hodis	Banais Rajbangshis
Gazipur	Barman	Koch	Garos
Coastal Area (Patuakhali, Barguna and Cox's Bazar districts)	Rakhain		
Greater Sylhet (Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, Hobiganj districts)	Monipuri Khasias Garos	Hajongs Patros Kharis	Santals Oraons
Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari districts)	Chakmas Marmas Tripuras Bawms Pangkhus	Lusais Tanchangyas Khangs Mrus	Asams, Gurkhas Chaks Khumis
South-West (Jessore, Satkhira, Khulna districts)	Bagdis (Bunos)	Rajbangshis	Santals
North Bengal (Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Nonagon, Bagura, Sirajganj, Chapainawabgonj, Natore districts)	Santals Oraons Mundas Malos Mahalis Khondos	Bedias Bhumij Koles Turi Bhils Karmakars Mahatos	Muriyars Musohors Pahans Paharias Rais Sings

Source: Solidarity 2002, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum

## Use of language

Over 50 percent of Adivasi groups as identified in Table 1 speak their own language more than 80 percent of the time at home; and the majority using it almost 100 percent of the time. The other language(s) used could have been another Adivasi

language or Bangla. Some Adivasi people in the plains area have already lost their language and use Bangla for most communication in the home and the wider community.

Most Adivasi in the CHT use their mother language all the time (100 percent) within their household; while in North Bengal most Adivasi households use their language less than 60 percent of the time at home (Rafi, 2006). In discussions with Tripura parents in Khagrachari most felt that their mother tongue was more useful and more important for their child to learn than Bangla (Durnnian, 2006).

Sociolinguistic surveys of some Adivasi communities in the plains clearly demonstrated that their mother tongue is the most spoken and useful language for these Adivasi communities. In the survey of Meitei speakers (Kim et al, 2003), in Sylhet Division, 98 percent of speakers surveyed used their mother tongue at home and 97 percent with Meitei neighbours. Survey speakers felt that their mother tongue was the most useful language in their community. Similar results were found in surveys of Bishnupriya speakers (Kim et al, 2003), War-Jaintia speakers (Brightbill et al, 2003), and speakers of languages in the Santali cluster of languages (Ahmed et al., 2005).

## Policy context for mother tongue-based MLE

In Bangladesh strategies, plans, frameworks and agreement pertaining to Adivasi people and their education rights exist at the national level which could support the development of a sustainable mother tongue-based multi-lingual education programme within the formal primary education system. To date the Government of Bangladesh has not acted upon its obligations and the opportunities presented in its strategies, plans, frameworks and signed agreements to ensure the education rights of Adivasi children. If the government is serious about achieving EFA for all Bangladeshi children including Adivasi children, they need to take action through their strategies and plans as well as fully implement its agreements and accords.

### International policy context

The Government of Bangladesh is signatory to numerous international conventions and initiatives to promote equity and equality in education.

- ILO Convention No 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, 1957
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (Bangladesh was one of the first 22 countries to sign it in 1990)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979
- Dakar Declaration Education for All by 2015 and sequential agreements

### *Dakar Declaration Education for All by 2015*

The Government of Bangladesh has committed itself to meet the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015. EFA stresses that all children have access to a *completely* free and compulsory primary education of good quality meaning that

...schools should accommodate *all children* regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other

conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, *children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities* and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, 1994, restated in the EFA Dakar Framework for Action 2000

The links between achieving EFA and the language of instruction have been recognised international by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. A positive link exists between mother tongue as the medium of instruction and enrolment and learning achievement of these children.

UNESCO (2003) in its education position paper *Education in a Multilingual World* fully supports multi-lingual education as a means of achieving quality education for all (EFA) but also supporting social equality. Their position is summarised in the three basic principles below:

1. UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.
2. UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
3. UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. (UNESCO, 2003:30)

#### *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)*

Bangladesh ratified the legally binding *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) (UN CRC). Therefore, the government recognises children as holders of rights, and their rights cover all aspects of their lives – civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights. Article 28 of the UN CRC recognises all children's right to education that is free and compulsory.

### Article 28

1. States Parties recognize **the right of the child to education** and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
  - (a) Make primary education **compulsory** and available **free** to all;
  - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
  - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
  - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
  - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

The UN CRC goes beyond just defining the access to education as a right but also defines what type of education in article 29. Children have a right to a quality inclusive education. Article 29 1(c) recognises that this education should respect children's culture, language and values – supporting the adoption of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education. Children have the right to education in their mother tongue.

### Article 29 – General comment on its implementation

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
  - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
  - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
  - (c) *The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her **own cultural identity, language and values**, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;*
  - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, *equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;*
  - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

Supporting the right of children to an education of quality is also the right of non-discrimination (article 2), the best interests of the child (article 3), and the rights to life, survival and development (article 6).

Article 30 of the UN CRC protects Adivasi children’s cultural and language rights further.

### **Article 30**

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous should not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, *to enjoy his or her own culture*, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or *to use his or her own language*.

General Comment is being proposed to the UN CRC (1989) regarding indigenous children and their rights. The aim is “to increase state accountability in regards to Indigenous children’s rights, given the disproportionate rights violations experienced by Indigenous children.” (ISG, 2006:30) Governments are often failing to meet their obligations towards Indigenous children under the UN CRC (1989). Violations of the rights of Indigenous children have come to the attention of the UN through reports by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People. (ISG, 2006)

### ***ILO Convention No. 107***

Bangladesh has ratified *ILO Convention No. 107 Indigenous and Tribal Populations* in 1972. The convention in Article 23 states that “children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue ...” (ILO No.107, 1957). This convention has not formed the basis of any actions or plans by the government.

### ***Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***

The *Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has been passed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, though yet to be adopted by the General Assembly. The *Draft Declaration* contains specific provisions on cultural and intellectual property, education (Article 14), child labour and exploitation (Article 17(2)), protection of children from violence and discrimination (Article 22) and protection against ethnocide and cultural genocide. “Indigenous people have the

collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct people ...” (Article 7 (2)). (ISG, 2006:28)

### **National policy context**

Adivasi people and their rights in Bangladesh are not recognised or protected specifically under the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh* or under any Bangladeshi law. Though, under Article 28 of the Constitution, it prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, and place of birth.

The Constitution (Article 15 and 17) refers to free and compulsory education and directs the State to adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to a certain level. However, education is a legally non-enforceable directive principle rather than a fundamental right that can be enforced.

In 1990, the *Compulsory Primary Education Act* made primary education compulsory for all children aged 6 to 10 but does not guarantee free education. The Act does not address issues of quality or coverage, important issues for especially Adivasi children. It is not clear why compulsory education is limited to children between 6 to 10 years old, far below international norms and the UN CRC (1989). The implications of the Act have not been publicised well so most people do not know primary education is compulsory and an obligation of the State to provide.

The *National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (PRS) - Unlocking the Potential (2005)* recognises the necessity of providing education to Adivasi children in their mother tongue at primary level.

5.408 The following actions have to be taken in improving the situation of adivasi/ethnic minority people:

- It is necessary to provide education to adivasi/ethnic minority people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at primary level.

*Unlocking the Potential - National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (PRS), 2005, p. 152-153.*

In terms of quality, education “has to be relevant for its recipients. Education needs to be life oriented and also livelihood oriented. It needs to function as toll for knowledge generation and self improvement however it also need to function as a

tool for income poverty reduction where the recipients of education can meet the demand of the labour markets” (Government of Bangladesh, 2005, p 125). This supports the need for education relevant to the culture and language of Adivasi children and their communities.

The Government of Bangladesh has not taken any actions or plans to fulfil the directive under the PRS to provide primary education to adivasi people in their own language. In this aspect the PRS is not adequately reflected in the national EFA plan or the national primary education programme, PEDP II.

### **Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) II**

The PEDP II is a sub-sector programme to improve the quality of the formal primary education system Bangladesh. This initiative is a partnership between the Government of Bangladesh and eleven international donor agencies. “The fundamental aim of [PEDP II] is to ensure the quality of primary education for all children in Bangladesh.” (DPE, no date: 1)

The key objectives of PEDP II are:

- to increase primary school access, participation and completion in accordance with the Government’s ‘Education For All’ (EFA), Poverty Reduction Strategy, Millennium Goals (MDGs) and other policy commitments
- to improve the quality of student learning and achievement outcomes to Primary School Quality Levels (PSQL) standard. (DPE, no date:2)

To address the specific education constraints and difficulties of Adivasi children, the “Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children” (2006) has been approved under the PEDP II and the umbrella of Inclusive Education. This is the only government plan to ensure education for Adivasi children. No projects have been initiated under the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE) to ensure the education rights of Adivasi children outside of the formal education system.

Under this strategy the DPE states that “cultural diversity in the education policy will be helpful for inclusive education regarding tribal children. Providing access and equity [and quality?] in education to these diverse group will require coordination of efforts between government and tribal community.” (MoPME, 2006:8) No mention

is made regarding cooperation with Hill District Councils, which have the responsibility for primary education in the three hill districts. Below are the specific recommendations of the Strategy.

### **Recommendations of “Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children” (2006)**

- **Recruit community based teachers:** Locally recruited teachers will be able to use local language to explain concepts and key learning points. This should not be seen only in terms of ensuring an increase in the number of tribal teachers but also supporting enrolment of tribal persons in the educational sector.
- **Organize training and orientation courses for teachers:** Teacher training needs to address the issues of child-friendly learning and inclusive education. Teachers need to understand the importance of recognizing differences in culture and identity such as the use of tribal names and traditional dress in schools. Locally available materials need to be used in teaching and local stories told in the classroom. Teachers need to be trained to accept all children in their classrooms, and to encourage children to recognize difference and diversity as a positive factor.
- **Introduce pre-primary schooling with language education:** Pre-primary schooling as a preparation for primary schooling may help reduce some of the disadvantages faced, especially by providing early schooling in mother tongue. This would introduce the child to the school and learning environment and offer gradual introduction to Bangla language. Language is a crucial issue in promoting education for tribal children.
- **Review curriculum and textbooks:** Review current national curriculum and textbooks to enhance knowledge of tribal cultures. This should be done in consultation with tribal experts in designing and developing appropriate teaching materials and methods. There are many important things that could be presented to all the students on tribal issues, including traditions of thousands of years, dances and music, stories based on nature and earth, knowledge in protecting environment and forests.
- **Improve infrastructure of the schools:** In many schools in remote areas it was found that the buildings are poorly maintained and requires repair and adequate furniture. Many primary schools do not have electricity, there are fewer facilities for drinking water and toilets. Based on local conditions residential schools may be constructed in some areas.
- **Provide stipends:** Provision of stipends and other incentives, such as Tiffin for students may help to overcome the difficulties faced by their situation and encourage them to enroll and retain them in school.
- **Strengthen the supervision and monitoring:** Teachers need support to change their teaching practice and create a more child-friendly and inclusive environment. Ensuring supervision and monitoring is an essential part of educational change management. Tribal community organizations and traditional social institutions can be strengthened and encouraged to monitor the educational services for their children.

*Recommendations continued.*

- **Strengthen the SMC:** Tribal parents almost have no participation in School Management Committee (SMCs). In many schools SMC members are nominated by election. This discourages tribal parents and they are reluctant to be candidates for SMC. It is essential to establish effective arrangements for the active participation of tribal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education services. Regular refresher courses are needed for SMC members.
- **Establish new primary schools:** In areas where there are no schools, new schools need to be established. This is particularly the case in the tea estate areas. It is also important to provide high schools close to the primary schools.
- **Allow for flexibility:** Allow schools to adjust school calendar according to local traditions, religion, and work. Allow for use of supplementary reading materials in local languages and encourage use of local materials as teaching aids.  
(MoPME, 2006:8-9)

Though the Primary Education Situational Analysis, Strategies and Action Plan for Mainstreaming Tribal Children (2006) makes important recommendations to address key issues regarding education for Adivasi children such as community based teachers; it does not fully address the issue of language. Language was identified as a “crucial” issue in relation to the access and quality of primary education for Adivasi children, but the recommendations only mention pre-primary. Currently pre-primary is outside the scope of the PEDP II. Even the actions that are proposed under this strategy in regards to language of instruction (pre-primary) are not planned for with the next year or more.

In reference to language and education, the recommendations do not take into full account the recommendation under the PRS (GoB, 2005) which stated that mother tongue education at primary level was necessary. In Appendix H Summary of Indigenous People’ Development Framework of PEDPII the strategies of PEDP II for remote areas stated that “19. The medium of instruction for 1-2 grades will be in the local language.” (MoPME, 2001:5). The new strategy and plan fall short in addressing the full education rights of Adivasi children – primary education in their mother tongue. Pre-primary in mother tongue is an important first step but does not go far enough in addressing the “crucial” issue of language and education in Bangladesh.

The issue is not simply one of Adivasi children learning just enough Bangla in pre-primary to cope in a Bangla medium primary classroom. It is unlikely children can

learn enough Bangla in one year of pre-primary to keep them in school and create successful learners. Mother tongue-based MLE is the effective and efficient approach to address the education rights of Adivasi children – access to a quality education in their mother tongue.

### **Context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

In Bangladesh the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a unique area geographically, politically, ethnically and religiously. Over the last thirty years the Adivasi communities in the CHT have sought recognition and autonomy within Bangladesh. The denial of this by the central government results in an armed insurgency in and militarization of the region. The insurgency ended in 1997 with the signing of the CHT Peace Accord between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), but the militarization of the region continues. The government has taken only halted steps in implementing its obligations under the Peace Accord (1997).

Under the Peace Accord (1997) education is a transferable responsibility to the Hill District Councils (HDCs). The HDCs have the power to recruit, appoint and transfer local teachers. Within the context of the CHT there is a strong likelihood that teachers are appointed to their own language community. Though primary education in mother tongue (33b) is a specific function of HDCs, currently they have limited involvement in education beyond authority over teachers. Education budget still go through the line ministry, MoPME. The capacity of the HDCs to full their role must be developed by involving them in development, implementation and monitoring of the government education programmes. Currently PEDP II is being implemented parallel to the HDCs.

In 1998 the Development Conference on Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was held Rangamati, attended by representatives from government, political parties, donors, local leaders, local NGOs, among others. The conference resulted in the Rangamati Declaration which is a development framework for the CHT. Fifteen recommendations were agreed and set out on education in the CHT. Four key recommendations are below:

53. Primary education be imparted in the mother tongue of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts;

54. Teachers of primary schools be employed from among the local people who speak the same language as the majority of the students of the area on a priority basis by relaxing the necessary qualifications and prerequisites;

56. Free education be provided to all students up to Class X;

70. The existing inaccurate and disrespectful references to the languages and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the national education curriculum be corrected in consultation with the leaders and representatives of the peoples concerned;

*The Rangamati Declaration, 1998, p. 6-7*

The language and education recommendations under the Rangamati Declaration (1998) and full transfer of education responsibilities under the CHT Peace Accord (1997) are not being acted upon or fully supported by the government and development partners. The planned UNDP “Basic Education in the CHT” project will be a positive step in this direction.

## Glossary

### **Language/medium of instruction**

Language used for teaching the curriculum of the educational system.

### **Language teaching**

This is different from the language of instruction which is used for communication and transferring knowledge. Language teaching is teaching a language as a class subject. Children learn about the grammar and structure of a language.

### **Linguistic diversity**

Language diversity reflects the existence of the multitude of languages spoken in the world which is variously estimated at between 6,000 and 7,000 languages. Preserving this diversity is a crucial challenge facing Asia and the world.

### **Linguistic rights**

In terms of education, the linguistic rights of minorities and indigenous people have been included in international conventions such as the UN CRC (1989). Language is fundamental to cultural identity and empowerment. Respect and recognition of linguistic diversity is essential for peaceful cohabitation. (UNESCO, 2003)

### **Minority language**

Language spoken by a specific group of people who do not constitute the majority of the population in a specific area (country, sub-region or state/province)

### **Mother tongue (MT)**

Mother tongue or mother language is the language(s) that a person has learnt first in the home; the language(s) a person identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) a person knows best and the language(s) one uses most.

### **Mother tongue instruction**

This is the use of children's mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

### **Bilingual or multilingual education (MLE)**

Education in which the learners' mother tongue and at least one other language are used as mediums of instruction

### **National or majority language**

Language that is spoken by the majority of people in a specific area (country, sub-region or state/province); usually the language of education, jobs, and political advancement in that area; in some countries the majority language is also the national and/or official language.

**Orthography**

The set of symbols used to write a language, writing system. For example, English has 26 letters in its orthography and Bangla has 39 letters or symbols.

**Script**

Type of symbols that are chosen to represent a particular writing system (examples: Roman script used for Kokborok (Tripura), Bangla script used for Bangla, Burmese script used for Marma)

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