

SIL

语言发展合作伙伴 Partners in Language Development *Faire équipe pour mettre les langues en valeur* Partner in der Spracharbeit Mitra dalam Pengembangan Bahasa 언어 개발의 협력자 Parceiro no Desenvolvimento do Potencial Lingüístico Партнёры по развитию национальных языков Colaborando en el desarrollo de los idiomas autóctonos

# Multilingual Education



# Multilingual Education

## A Two-Way Bridge



Studies demonstrate that learning is most effective when the instruction is received in the language the learner knows best. This simple truth extends from basic reading and writing skills in the first language to second language acquisition. In multilingual education programs (MLE) that start with the mother tongue, learners use their own language for learning in the early grades, while also learning the official language as a classroom subject. As learners gain competence in understanding, speaking, reading and writing the language of education, teachers begin using it for instruction. This instructional bridge between the community language and the language of wider communication enables learners—children and adults alike—to meet their broader multilingual goals while retaining their local language and culture.

### **This booklet addresses several important aspects of MLE:**

- The voices of ethnolinguistic minority communities are often not heard. Therefore, advocacy is appropriate for these communities to meet their MLE needs.
- Conventional instructional methods are not adequate for MLE programs. Educators at both community and national levels need to develop their capacity to design and implement MLE programs.
- Developing a writing system for a non-dominant language is a challenging but essential early step in developing an MLE program.
- MLE not only requires the commitment and resources of the local community, but also the resources and expertise available from government agencies, NGOs or others. Resource linking brings the partners together so that each one contributes its own particular resources.
- MLE gives children and adults a firm foundation for continuing to learn throughout their lives.

Listen to this young woman from Southeast Asia: “To learn at school is difficult because I don’t know how to speak the national language.” By working together, we can help her and millions like her succeed in school and—with an identity firmly rooted in their own culture—become aware of, and participate in the wider world.

SIL participates in MLE by serving as an advocate for and with local communities, linking them to supportive resources and helping each build capacity to develop appropriate programs.

[www.sil.org/literacy-and-education](http://www.sil.org/literacy-and-education)

## The Components of Sustainable Multilingual Education Programs



Diagram concept by Susan E. Malone, Ph.D.  
[www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/mle\\_chart.pdf](http://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/mle_chart.pdf)

*MLE programs require innovative thinking and cooperation among individuals, communities, organizations and agencies. This diagram displays the essential components of the strongest programs.*



# Advocacy

## *If you don't speak the language, how do you ask for help?*

The voices of ethnolinguistic communities are often not heard—they need an advocate to assist them in expressing their needs to the agencies and individuals that can help them achieve their education and development goals. There are various levels of advocacy, from raising the awareness among agencies that support multilingual education (MLE) objectives and mobilizing start-up program facilitators, to continuing relationships with MLE graduates.

## Advocacy in Papua New Guinea

“We have a few books written in our language, but why aren't we reading them? How can I encourage our children to read and write in their own language?”

These questions expressed the burden that grew into a vision for James Warebu—daytime classes filled with children learning to read and write Usarufa, and evening classes for adults.

Mr. Warebu knew about the Papua New Guinea government's desire that children be educated first in their mother tongue before bridging into the national language. But he knew he would need help to give this opportunity to Usarufa children. He consulted with various SIL staff members and attended several workshops that confirmed to him that one of the main hurdles facing Usarufa literacy was the need for a revised alphabet.

His enthusiasm was contagious. Family and friends joined the fight to rescue their language from extinction. Several attended an alphabet design workshop followed by a trial alphabet class. Then they produced reading primers. As classes began, the adults were thrilled that the younger generation was now speaking their mother tongue more fluently. Adults eagerly began joining literacy classes.

An SIL consultant assisted in facilitating some language development goals for the Usarufa people by working for 18 months as an advocate with national and international NGOs. Spurred on by the community's enthusiasm and commitment, supported by SIL's advocacy and encouraged by the ability to link to vital resources, Mr. Warebu's dream is being fulfilled.



An Usarufa man reads the program for the opening ceremony of the literacy project.

James Warebu and SIL advocate David Wake celebrate the ground-breaking for the Usarufa Literacy Resource Centre.



CHINA—Provincial government leaders from the People's Republic of China celebrated the official opening of a bilingual education preschool program for the Shilong Bai people to supplement the adult mother-tongue literacy program. SIL facilitated the adaptation of modern teaching techniques to this village setting where local language use was formerly limited to oral expression.

## Bangladesh

SIL is facilitating workshops aimed at helping Bangladeshi NGOs partner with local language communities. This series of workshops encourages each NGO's staff to develop a model MLE program in one community served by that NGO partner. Five partnering NGOs and language communities participated in four of the workshops.



# Capacity Building

***People learn best when they learn in a language they understand well.***

Multilingual education (MLE) makes quality education possible by adapting conventional instructional methods and materials to fit a local culture. It creates a bridge over the cultural and linguistic barriers that block minority language speakers from learning and living within the wider language and culture. Since MLE programs require careful development and training, MLE consultants can assist community educators and national program designers in building their capacity to create effective multilingual education programs.

## Ethnic Minority Language Discoveries

“I thought that my language [Quechua] was not equal to the majority language [Spanish]. I believed that was true until I began studying with people from other countries to document my culture, my language and how to write it. As I began to discover the letters I needed and analyzed the grammar, I realized that my language is just as good as any other. My language has morphological, syntactic and semantic structures,” said Peruvian student Édison Convercio Ibarra.

Seventeen other students made similar discoveries about their own languages. They came from 16 language communities in Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru to attend a course taught in Spanish at the Universidad Ricardo Palma in Lima, Peru.

This was the first time most of the students had intensely analyzed the grammars of their languages. The 10-month course was designed to give speakers of ethnic minority languages a strong foundation in applied linguistics, enabling them to participate in language development in their own communities by gaining a strong understanding of their own languages. Several of the students are currently bilingual school teachers or directors of schools.

Another student, Bibiana Mendoza Garcia from the Mixteco language community, described the goal of this applied linguistics program: “My fellow students and I see the need for such training and are considering how to pass on what we learn to others who haven’t had the chance to study this way.”



*Participants learn to confidently transfer to others what they learned as they take leadership in documenting and preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage.*



*Every day students and teachers alike learn something new.*

*GUATEMALA—Children in Guatemala watch an Ixil video “My Heart Language,” written and filmed by an Ixil video crew. It was created to teach Ixil people to read their language. This local team now writes, films and edits their own videos, and they are ready to help others do the same.*



## Ethiopia

As part of a five-year pilot project with the Ethiopian Regional Culture Bureau, SIL conducted an MLE planning workshop. The project includes making primers, training teachers, monitoring and evaluating primary school classes and making further recommendations for five languages of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

## Thailand

Mahidol University and SIL held training workshops in Bangkok for 60 participants from governments, NGOs, universities and language communities to plan MLE projects in 12 countries. UNESCO and UNICEF sponsored the workshops.





# MLE Bridge



Many local language communities are multilingual. In addition, some want to communicate in the national language and possibly also in an international language. Multilingual education programs (MLE) promote first-language literacy skills, providing the means to meet broader multilingual goals.

Successful MLE enables mother-tongue speakers of non-dominant languages to build a culturally and linguistically appropriate educational foundation in their home language first. Then they can successfully use that foundation as a bridge to one or more additional languages. MLE provides the opportunities for lifelong learning in the local as well as national and international languages.



Chart concept by Dennis L. Malone, Ph.D.  
[www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/mle\\_bridge.pdf](http://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/mle_bridge.pdf)



# Writing Systems

## Writing System Design

Before a language can be used in the classroom, the language must have a written form. The development of a writing system (orthography) for a language is a complex and challenging task. It requires careful analysis of how a language is constructed. What are the various sounds the language uses and what would be the best way to represent them? What script should be used? To answer these and other questions, linguistics and literacy consultants work with language communities, universities and governments in the process.

Community-based workshops and mentorships are effective means to equip individuals to do linguistic analysis and sociolinguistic research, and to provide training in writing-system design and standardization issues. This participatory approach to writing system development fosters community interest and ownership of the result and is crucial to the success of a writing system and a language development program.

## Orthography Design Workshops

“Orthography development is like mining for gold. It takes a lot of work to get there, but when you finally arrive, you’ve reached a real treasure!” exclaimed a workshop attendee.

Printed materials in the Kuria language of Tanzania were not widely used. At an orthography workshop, the Kuria writing system was reviewed. The local team discovered that the problem wasn’t with the orthography, but instead with the assumptions of readers that the Kuria language was constructed like the trade language, Swahili. Workshop participants uncovered several significant differences between the writing systems of Kuria and Swahili. With this awareness and minimal instruction, they could more easily begin reading their mother tongue.

Speakers from related languages also attended the workshop. The participants learned from one another and exchanged encouragement for their efforts. Since the Simbiti language is related to Kuria, the Kuria orthography became a starting point for developing the Simbiti writing system.

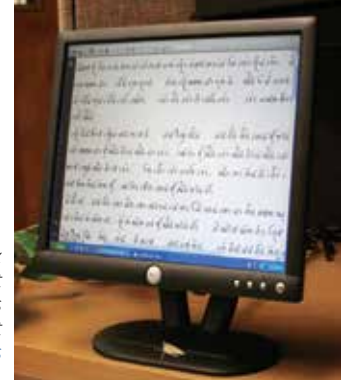
Seeing his language in print, a Simbiti speaker exclaimed, “A veil has been lifted from my eyes about my language. It has so much beauty!”



Workshop participants use their knowledge of the language in analysis exercises.



SIL has produced computer fonts for a variety of complex Roman and non-Roman scripts around the world so that script-related issues will not hinder language communities in their materials production. Available for download at [www.sil.org/resources/software\\_fonts](http://www.sil.org/resources/software_fonts)



## Cambodia

The orthography development process for the Kuy speakers in Cambodia is faced with the challenges of a broad phonemic inventory, the use of the complex Khmer script and the fact that few Kuy speakers have adequate literacy skills in that script. Despite these complications, the community’s contribution and participation in the process has been significant. Language awareness meetings, an orthography workshop and a language committee—all lay a good foundation for the Kuy speakers to embrace their new writing system.

*PAPUA NEW GUINEA—Two-week Alphabet Design Workshops (ADW) give an opportunity for local-language teachers, trainers and community members to write stories in their own language, discuss and choose orthographic options, produce a trial spelling guide and begin compiling a dictionary. The ADW method relies on speakers’ perceptions of their language, and consequently reflects the sound system in its cultural context as viewed by the speakers of the language. SIL assisted the Papua New Guinea Department of Education to produce trial orthographies for over 100 languages with funding provided by the Australian government.*



# Resource Linking

## ***Many hands make light work.***

This proverb aptly describes the benefits of partners working together with language communities to establish multilingual education (MLE) programs. Each partner contributes its own particular resources and expertise. Strong educational programs that help students bridge to national and international languages can be built through the combined efforts of government agencies, NGOs, universities and donors. MLE programs that link multiple resources enable more active involvement by the local community, which increases the likelihood of a sustainable MLE program.

## **MLE Teacher Training in Bangladesh**

“I had applied for teacher job but I did not know any details. Later I learned about MLE,” Suma Khyang said during a teacher-training workshop. “I was to teach Khyang children in their mother tongue. I felt confused—we had no books in our language because it is only spoken. If we started mother-tongue instruction,” she wondered, “would parents send their children to class? If no children came, how long would my job last?”

In preparation for the new school term, teachers attended an MLE workshop held in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. They learned that early education is most effective when students are instructed in their mother tongue. The participants produced mother-tongue materials that could be used by teachers from the local community in order to implement the new curriculum.

Activities like these help to build instructional bridges between the community language and languages of wider communication. When students learn basic reading and writing skills in their first language, they are able to meet their broader multilingual and educational goals while retaining their local language and culture.

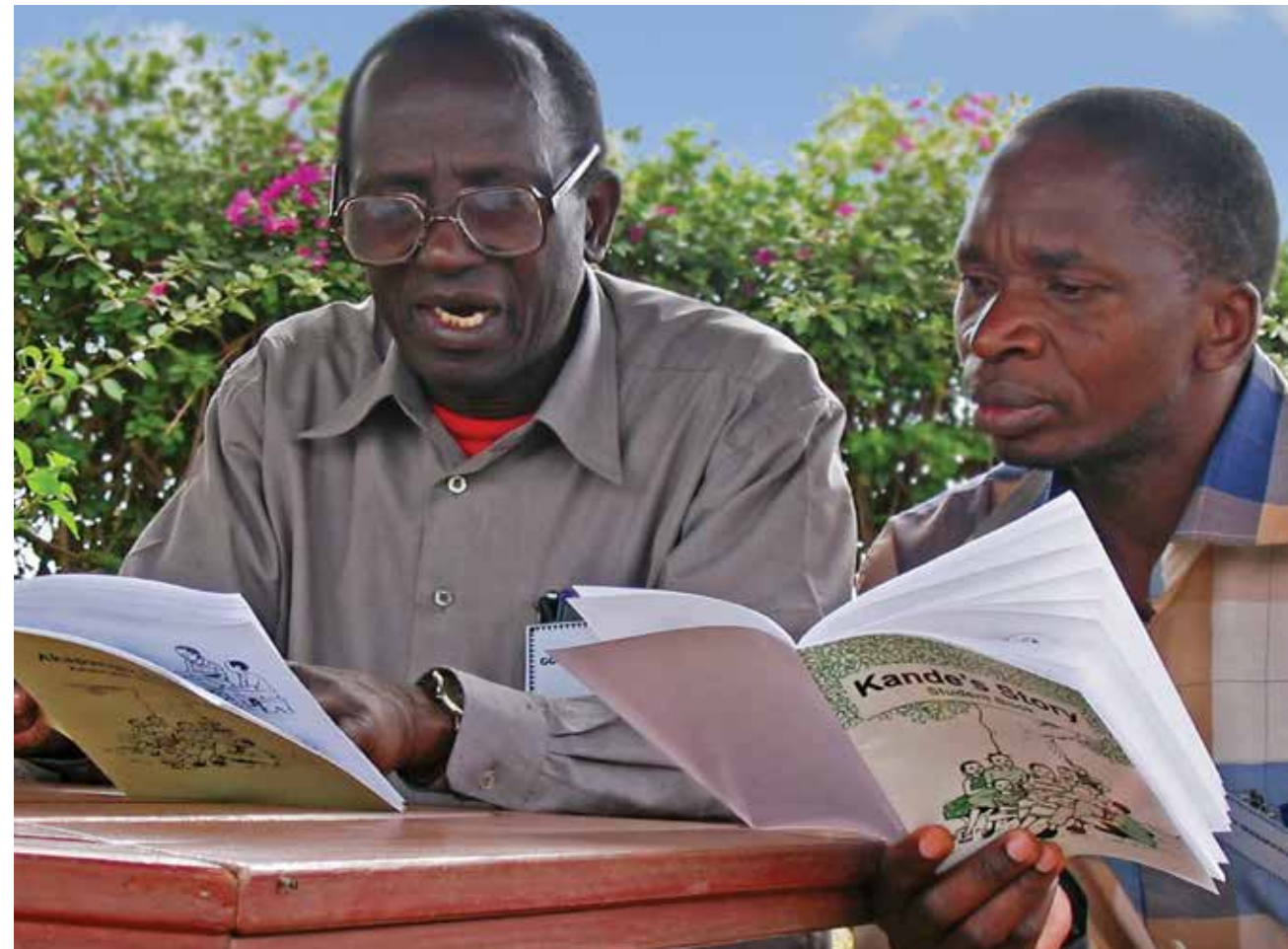
At the end of her training, Suma said, “I think MLE is the right way of education for the ethnic children of Bangladesh. We teachers understand this now.” She is prepared to help parents understand that education begun in the mother tongue is a key to their children’s future success in school and in life.



*A teacher-training course in Bangladesh was supported by a coalition that includes the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), SIL International and other NGOs.*



*The harmonium is a common instrument in Bangladesh.*



*MALAYSIA—In response to a UNESCO request to SIL Malaysia, the Dayak Bidayuh National Association and SIL staff have been implementing an MLE project in five Bidayuh languages.*



*AFRICA—Participants from six east African countries attended HIV/AIDS awareness workshops sponsored by SIL and several partner organizations as part of their continued emphasis on health and education for less-advantaged peoples. Original songs were composed to accompany HIV/AIDS prevention, and treatment materials written in culturally appropriate story form. All were recorded for audio playback, and the booklets were translated and printed in eight local languages plus five languages of wider communication.*

## **Sudan**

Ten people were chosen by each of the Southern Sudanese State Education Ministries to attend workshops conducted by MLE consultants to discuss principles for implementing transitional bilingual education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is using information and ideas from the workshops to draft its language and education policy.



# Lifelong Learning

## ***Building on a firm foundation***

Young people and adults who gain fluency in reading and writing their mother tongue first are better prepared to transfer literacy skills to other languages—acquiring essential tools for lifelong learning. Strong mother-tongue-first education for adults enables members of communities to access the knowledge and information they need in order to take an active part in local and national development efforts. The results are the growth of self esteem, and a community that is better equipped to become literate in languages of wider communication.

## **A Vision for Mother-Tongue Literacy**

**Burkina Faso**—Abdramane Traore created a successful soap-making and training business, selling 500 bars per month. As a child he did not complete his primary education because he did not know the school language. As a young adult he enrolled in a literacy class in his mother tongue, Témoinages. His eagerness to learn led him also to become a literacy teacher.

**Mexico**—A radio announcement in the Mazatec language advertised a two-week reading and writing course in the local school during summer vacation. The inspiration for this class was Felix, a Mazatec speaker who loves his language and has a vision for other adults becoming literate in their mother tongue. During the afternoons, two university-level students attended—they were fluent in reading Spanish, but also wanted to learn to read Mazatec, their mother tongue.

**Argentina**—Toba-speaking adults with some Spanish reading ability attended a class to transfer their skills so they could read their mother tongue. Nine graduates of this class later attended a primer-writing workshop. Using the COMELE method (Combinación de Métodos de Lectoescritura), they learned to write basic literacy materials. The week-long workshop resulted in eight guided lessons in Toba for non-literates or semi-literates.

**SENEGAL**—A woman completing her second year of basic Saafi literacy said, “Now I can help my children attending primary school to read their French readers.”



**EAST ASIA**—Mother-tongue classes for young adults train non-dominant language speakers to become literate in their mother tongue, while building a strong foundation for acquisition of national and international languages.

### ***Solomon Islands***

Though familiar with English and Pijin, a villager promptly bought two copies of story books he found in his mother tongue, Cheke Holo. He began reading aloud—to no one in particular—and suddenly exclaimed, “This is my language!”



*Abdramane became a Témoinages literacy teacher while conducting a successful business.*



*Felix teaches other Mazatec speakers how to read their mother tongue.*



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## About SIL International

The purpose of SIL is to build capacity for sustainable language development through research, translation, training and materials development for ethnolinguistic minority communities. SIL recognizes that multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding.

At the international level, as a nongovernmental organization, SIL has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is an official NGO partner (consultative status) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). SIL is a founding member of Maaya, the World Network for Linguistic Diversity.

## Multilingual Education Resources

*Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: Including the excluded.* 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO. 5 booklets.

*Beyond the bilingual classroom: Literacy acquisition among Peruvian Amazon communities.* 1993. Dallas: SIL International and the University of Texas at Arlington.

*First language first: Community-based literacy programmes for minority language contexts in Asia.* 2005. Bangkok: UNESCO.

*Language and education in Africa: Answering the questions.* 2008. Nairobi: Multilingual Education Network of Eastern Africa.

*Manual for developing literacy and adult education programmes in minority language communities.* 2004. Bangkok: UNESCO.

*Mother tongue-based literacy programmes: Case studies of good practice in Asia.* 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO.

*Mother tongue matters: Local language as a key to effective learning.* 2008. Paris: UNESCO.

*Promoting literacy in multilingual settings.* 2007. Bangkok: UNESCO.

*Steps toward learning: A guide to overcoming language barriers in children's education.* 2009. London: Save the Children UK.

