MLE ADVOCACY: OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (Bangkok time; GMT+7), 23 March 2022 via Zoom

Compiled Q&A

1. **How can MLE practitioners connect with national delegates for high-level events such as APREMC-II?**

In order to connect with national delegates related to SDG 4 (education), MLE practitioners can contact following offices for possible engagement/involvement in the consultation processes:

- Respective national commission for UNESCO,
- UNESCO field offices,
- UNICEF country offices,
- A SDG 4 coordinator at Ministry of Education.

When you write directly to them, it would be useful to prepare evidence/cases and link your suggestion to national agenda/position.

2. **What narratives or messages should be provided for effective MLE advocacy in media and communications?**

The choice of messages depends on communication purposes, channels and target audiences for the advocacy campaign.

One of the most important narratives of the MLE is the relation between the MLE and the idea of nationalism (i.e. one nation, one language or one culture). MLE advocates may need to communicate with people to help them understand and recognize that diversity strengthens national unity and MLE as an integral part of that diversity. We also need to know that people may feel MLE as a threat to their national identity. Therefore, the way messages are designed such as tones, word choice, who presenters, and narrators also needs to be well considered.

In order to gain more understanding of MLE, some powerful advocacy messages include the testimonies of minority students’ parents and teachers on the minority students’ improved learning and future opportunities as a result of MLE programmes. Likewise, it is also to include the improved learning outcomes in MLE programmes so that government officials share this information with other stakeholders. Linking to current national issues or needs, especially equity discourses and how MLE rights assist the achievement of reducing inequity, fostering better social cohesion, and improving society in general, can also be a powerful message.
3. How might advocacy be approached differently through the various stages of MTB-MLE implementation (before adoption of a policy, policy making, policy implementation) in various realms (teacher training, materials, instruction, etc.) for initial phases, expanding MLE, sustaining MLE?

More persuasion based on evidence (such as research and positive cases) is needed in the early stages to reduce opposition or respond to concerns. As the process evolves, more attention is needed to the process of implementation and cost. In Southeast Asia, successful MLE advocacy has generally been continuous over a long period of time and by many different groups of advocates at different levels (e.g., local and international NGOs, international agencies, academics, some local/district level government officials, members of non-dominant language communities). Different actors have certainly used different approaches. Searching for some case studies on Cambodia and the Philippines, for example, to see what various actors have done at various stages might be helpful.

4. In some contexts, the government has some MLE policies written down but no true implementation strategy or action points. How can MLE advocacy work at the grassroots level to restart or continue the MLE movement?

The gap between the official written policy and practice, i.e., the implementation of the policy, is quite common in many Asian countries. In some countries, the “side actors” (see Kosonen’s presentation1) have challenged government agencies by pointing out the discrepancy, showing the actual policy documents, and demonstrating the non-implementation of the policies. Over time, this has led some countries (or regions within nation-states) to good practice.

In addition, governments may offer MLE policies or measures but delay the full adoption or implementation. The only response to this is constant vigilance, comparing what is promised with what is delivered, partnering with the media to hold governments accountable, and keeping up the pressure. Community-based action at the non-formal education level is also important to respond to the commitment of community groups for action.

5. What are some strategies to involve local community stakeholders (local government organizations, parents/caregivers, universities, researchers) in MLE advocacy?

One strategy is a campaign, which requires coordinated action so that different groups contribute according to their sphere of interest and influence. Each group should take action in its distinctive domain and then contribute to an overall strategy that requires constant negotiation.

Strengthening existing mechanisms such as school committees is also a powerful strategy. In Thailand, all schools are required to have a school committee, a form of school management with participation from various sectors in the community. If the school committee is provided with appropriate support and capacity building, they can drive MTB-MLE advocacy at the local

level (e.g., the case of Soblan MTB-MLE school in Omgoi district in Thailand). However, there is a lack of capacity building or resource support at the moment to fulfil their duties and responsibilities. Similar to the school committee, strengthening existing Indigenous/ethnic networks and orienting them with MTB-MLE is also helpful.

Engage with municipal/provincial administrative offices related to education and funding. In the case of Thailand, working with the Provincial Administrative Office’s Education Department has a direct impact on MTB-MLE related resource allocation as they oversee the annual budget to secure funds for MTB-MLE related training. There is a successful example in Chiangmai, and other provinces should learn from this case. Furthermore, mobile applications such as ‘Line’ and a local village broadcast program called ‘VoiceLine’ (เสียงตามสาย) can broadcast and promote key short messages of MTB-MLE to the community.

6. How can MLE advocacy operationalize a broad definition of ‘indigenous’ in the Asia-Pacific Context?”

There have been various attempts to define ‘indigenous’ for Asia through consultations with Indigenous peoples. The conclusions were most often that a one-size-fits-all definition was not deemed necessary nor realistic. Many languages in Asia are endangered, but the difference in other regions such as Africa is that, in Africa, often the languages of past colonizers (English, French) are the official language of communication in schools and public administration, which is not always the case in Asia (except the Philippines and Timor Leste where, respectively, English and Portuguese are one of the official languages). In Asia, different contexts yield different perspectives of what is ‘indigenous’. For example, Indonesia adheres to the same principle as Africa, whereas Indigenous languages need support vis-à-vis the dominant Thai and Vietnamese languages in Thailand and Vietnam. A universal definition would not be applicable to each country, and it is more realistic to be flexible with socio-cultural realities and self-determined by communities themselves.

7. A major barrier to the preservation of Indigenous languages (ILs) is a lack of orthographies (writing & spelling systems) for those languages. There is also a lack of expertise in this field. Are there any MLE advocacy efforts being made to meet the need for orthography specialists?

Strategies for development of writing systems for the “oral” languages need to be carefully reviewed and evaluated. Any assumption that “without an IL-specific orthographic system the language cannot be a language of literacy and school learning” is not valid. There are conditions under which orthographic development can also be bypassed without necessarily undermining the role of writing systems. So, the approaches - right-based as well as pragmatic-educational ones - need to be critically examined on the basis of the available evidence for the language and context.

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8. What are some good brief brochures for introducing the topic of MTB-MLE that could be translated into other languages?

- Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: The Key to Unlocking SDG 4 - Quality Education for All (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-key-unlocking-sdg-4-quality-education-all)
- MTB-MLE - Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: Lessons Learned from a Decade of Research and Practice (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mtb-mle-mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-lessons-learned-decade-research-and)
- Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines (http://mothertongue-based.blogspot.com/2009/01/mle-primer.html)
- Additional resources that may be useful for MTB-MLE advocacy efforts:
  - The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/bangkok-statement-language-and-inclusion)
  - Tools for Planning and Monitoring Programmes of Multilingual Education in Asia (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/tools-planning-and-monitoring-programmes-multilingual-education-asia)
  - MTB MLE RESOURCE KIT - Including the Excluded: Promoting Multilingual Education (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mtb-mle-resource-kit-including-excluded-promoting-multilingual-education)
  - MTB-MLE - Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: Lessons Learned from a Decade of Research and Practice (https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/mtb-mle-mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-lessons-learned-decade-research-and)