

Relationships between government and NGOs in a multilingual education project in Andhra Pradesh, India¹

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Abstract

Most tribal languages in India are neither officially recognised nor used in any official capacity; most have not been scripted and lack written literature and curricula. Education is conducted in the major state languages and tribal children, who are not familiar with the language of instruction, are at a disadvantage from the start. Teachers, who neither speak the community language nor appreciate the children's traditional culture have had no training in teaching minority language children. The drop out rate is high. Tribal languages and cultures, and thus the children's identities, are being marginalized and ignored through the current education programme. Even so, the India Education Policy states that every child has the right to learn in his/her mother tongue.

This paper looks at the development of a multilingual education project in the tribal region of Andhra Pradesh, India, where a complex linguistic situation exists. The tribal community crosses five state borders. Four majority languages exert an influence on the minority languages and there are various scripts which could be used to create orthographies for the unwritten languages. The paper discusses the networks of relationships and expertise required to support such an initiative and on the need for constructive relationships between local and international NGOs, academic institutions and local, national and international government agencies. It looks in particular at government support, without which such an initiative is likely to be effective, and at the delicate balance between government demands and the needs of local communities.

Background

The linguistic context of India. India's cultural and linguistic diversity creates a rich heritage and provides invaluable but underused resources. However, as most of its languages do not have official recognition and are not used in any official capacity, it is likely that many of these minority languages, along with their associated cultures, knowledge and skills, will die within one or two generations.

The education context. The Indian Education Policy states that every child has the right to learn in his/her mother tongue, but education is conducted only in the major state languages. Tribal languages are not used and tribal children, who are not familiar with the language of instruction, are at a disadvantage from the start. Besides this, the state curriculum bears little relationship to the tribal child's culture or to his or her previous knowledge and understanding. Children are not only learning in a language they do not know, they are also attempting to learn concepts, which have no familiar foundation, in that language.

Teachers rarely speak the community language and few appreciate the children's traditional culture. They have had no training in teaching second language learners and so the children are taught as first language speakers. Many teachers are unwilling to live in the tribal communities.

Many communities see their language as a hindrance to improving economic conditions and accessing better facilities. Children often attempt to conceal their tribal origins as tribal culture and language is often regarded as inferior.

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It is not surprising that the dropout rate among tribals is high – over 80% in the first year of primary school in some areas. While this is due to a combination of other socio-economic factors, the language and culture of the curriculum and the lack of support given by and to teachers in these schools are contributory factors.

Tribal languages and cultures, and thus the children’s identities, are being marginalized and ignored by the current education system. This disregard by the education system of tribal language and culture, where it succeeds, is likely to destroy tribal communities.

For a number of reasons, providing an education using tribal languages and cultures would be beneficial. Educational theory suggests that:

- A child learns best from a familiar starting point;
- Learning to read in the mother tongue is easier than learning to read in an unfamiliar language;
- Academic concepts are best learned in the mother tongue;
- Second language learning is more successful if founded on solid first language ground;
- Reading and writing skills, as well as new concepts, can be transferred from one language to another;

Even though India’s linguistic complexity generates an enormous challenge for education the government of Andhra Pradesh has decided to take on the challenge and produce an education programme for tribals in nine of its languages.

Multilingual education project

The origins of the project currently being developed by the Education and Tribal Welfare departments in Andhra Pradesh began ten years ago with an NGO working among the Gond/Koya tribal group. A complex situation exists here: the tribal communities, which were originally part of an independent kingdom, were split into four states - now five - with four majority languages (and majority cultures) exerting an influence and various scripts from which to choose an orthography. The development of the project from this writer’s perspective was as follows:

1994	A request came for developing the language from a Tribal based NGO in Bhadrachalam. They wanted to help tribal people feel proud of their origins and not lose their roots.
1994-2001	Help was sought from international NGOs. Much learning was taking place. It was felt that there was little use in simply transcribing the language. In order to establish the language within the new tribal context, it needed to be firmly established as part of the government’s education policy and practice. Attitudes within local NGOs, who were already transcribing the language, were changing. They were willing to work alongside the government. UNESCO was taking up a strong position in favour of mother tongue education, and in general there was a greater awareness of the needs of tribal communities in terms of identity, culture and education.
Jan 2002	Discussions were held with Indian-based NGOs and academic institutions including the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) and the linguistic departments at Hyderabad and Telugu Universities.

July 2002	Ideas for the project were put before the Education and Tribal Welfare Secretaries and the Department of Tribal Welfare later that year. The response was positive.
Feb-March 2003	A Multilingual Education course in the UK helped to shape the ideas and outline the specific needs of the program. A comprehensive project outline was developed with Linguists from Telugu and Hyderabad Universities and members of SIL International. ²
June – July 2003	The proposal was presented again to the Secretary for Education who called a meeting the following week at which it was decided that the government should take on the proposal fully. A directive was sent from the Education Secretary to the Tribal Welfare Department to develop the programme. It was decided to develop this in the nine largest language communities.
July – Nov 2003	Tribal Welfare developed plans starting with a baseline survey, lexical collection, text collection, and cultural documentation. ³

International and local NGOs, even with the support of Indian academic institutions, could not give this programme the authority it requires. Only government can provide the necessary infrastructure and weight necessary for implementation. However, all of these government and non-government agencies and institutions are essential for the successful implementation of the project.

The need for networks

Many players are necessary in this kind of programme - central and local government, local communities, NGOs and academic institutions. This section looks specifically at the roles of NGOs, governments, academic institutions and local communities, and the relationship between them needed for a successful programme.

NGOs. NGOs tend to identify with those who are neglected and disadvantaged. They feel an obligation to underserved communities and often deliver education in situations where government policy and practice has failed, filling the gaps where government has most difficulty in provision. They often see the government as incompetent, lacking the capacity to provide adequate services. NGOs often rate governments as conservative, cautious and bureaucratic, while they themselves can provide an honest analysis of situations, think creatively, provide comprehensive problem-solving strategies and act innovatively.

NGOs involved in education often have the ability to implement innovative projects which have positive results in the project area, but experience shows that most if these projects are not upgraded, nor do they spread to other areas. Few have an impact on government policy or practice, particularly if there had been no government approval, consultation or collaboration during planning and implementation. Even where the government sanctions a pilot project, there is often no follow-up, lessons are not learned and new plans are not implemented beyond the pilot work. Most of these projects are based on disparate ideas with no continuity between one project and another.

² The proposal and time frame are attached as Appendix 1 and 2 at the end of this paper.

³ By June 2004 an alphabet had been worked out and first grade curriculum text and materials in mother tongue, based on the local tribal culture had been developed. Training had taken place and the curriculum piloted in 10 schools in each language area.

NGOs have traditionally worked alone on their own projects with their own motivations, plans, funds and supporting agencies. They have rarely sought government approval of projects and bypass government when planning, applying for funds and implementing programmes. Education is highly labour intensive and most NGOs do not have the resources or capacity to maintain educational projects. They usually have the resources only for the life of the project. Thus, educational programmes are rarely sustainable beyond the pilot project.

Many are now realising that small-scale projects, even if they are innovative and effective, cannot be sustained by individual and isolated organisations. NGOs are thus increasingly willing to come together with other NGOs and government to support development programmes. Government approval, involvement and support at all levels are keys to effectiveness and sustainability. While NGOs have to build trust with government agencies, a balance needs to be maintained as they could lose their innovative abilities and thus their effectiveness in seeking the best for the local communities.

Government. Governments are generally considered to have a moral obligation to provide people with access to services. Education is one of those essential services and only government can provide the political backing, the resources (e.g. human, financial and material) and the infrastructures (e.g. buildings and administration) necessary for effective and sustainable education programmes. Only government can sustain these services over time, which is essential if individuals and communities are to be benefited.

There are many administrative structures already established in the Indian education system to provide support for the ML Education programme. For example,

- The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), which has decentralised education to the district level. Local support for the program is essential and the DPEP can provide this support.
- Each village has a Village Education Committee (VEC) made up of local community members who have responsibility for overseeing the adequacy of government educational provision. Currently, these committees do not operate well in many of the tribal regions so it will be necessary to strengthen them. In four districts in Andhra Pradesh (AP), such training is already going on through CARE STEP (Sustainable Tribal Empowerment Programme).
- DPEP has set up resource centres at circle level to provide regular academic support to primary schools and to village education committees (VECs). These are known as “circle resource centres” or CLRCs. The Sub-Inspector of Schools in charge of the Circle acts as the Circle Projects Co-ordinator. CLRCs are intended to have their own buildings, which house the office of the Sub-Inspector of schools, a library and a documentation centre. These centres are expected to support local primary school teachers with regular formal and informal training and interaction on pedagogic and management issues. Three specially trained primary school teachers from local schools are appointed on a deputation basis in the Circle Resource Centre. For the purposes of MLEd specifically trained Resource Teachers will be necessary.

In general Governments have traditionally been suspicious of NGO involvement in education; they question their motivations and aims. They often react to NGO interventions, seeing them as an affront to government legitimacy. Governments assume it is their responsibility to provide education; they are the accredited and recognised implementers of education.

NGOs are often considered sub-standard and so NGO involvement in education is often controlled and regulated. The way in which this is usually done is through registration, setting standards, and limiting the geographical area in which NGOs work. The last few years have seen a proliferation of NGOs in India and care has to be taken if new NGOs with little or no experience are involved. Supervision is essential to

ensure good quality training, teaching and materials. The government can provide the means for quality control and more uniform preparation for educational programmes.

Education itself is often seen as a means of social control, which is government territory. On the other hand, many NGOs see education as a means to liberty and freedom.

Governments are often happy for NGOs to work in the non-formal sector or in remote and difficult areas where provision is inadequate. Government rarely supports this provision unless it comes under NFE.

Government-NGO relationships were often confrontational and NGOs have often been seen as competitors rather than collaborators. But governments are increasingly recognising the need for links with other organisations who either understand local situations or who have the expertise needed to support and implement government projects. NGOs are good in community empowerment while government agencies are capable of providing the infrastructure and training.

Communities. The support and participation of local community members is essential for the development of mother tongue education. Only community members know the local context and how to relate in it. They know the language and the people – the storytellers, those who would be acceptable teachers, traditional ways of learning and local knowledge. “If local programs are to build on local knowledge then those who know a community best need to be fully involved in planning the curriculum, developing the reading materials and evaluating learners' progress.”⁴ Local participation would lead to local ownership and acceptance.

Academic institutions. Various forms of expertise will be required including linguistic and educational help. International NGOs, academic institutions (linguistic and educational) and government development agencies all have a role to play. India already has a number of institutions with linguistic expertise, including universities, academic institutions and NGOs. Constructive relationships at all levels are essential in a venture of this size and complexity.

Relationships

Mechanisms for collaboration. Before looking at NGO-GO collaboration, we find that in many governments, there is a lack of coordination and communication between departments and levels of government. In the initial stages of this project, various departments, including NGOs, were called together to discuss the issues. Since then, two government departments have been involved and one, Tribal Welfare, is the central location for administration and development.

Between NGOs and government, there are few mechanisms for collaboration and what there is, is weak. In order to achieve its goals, in more recent years, however, government has welcomed NGO activity in domains where it has difficulty, for example, at community level with disadvantaged groups. However, where NGOs have improved quality and access, they find that unless there is a policy change, sustainability is unlikely. But even where NGOs are involved in the practical aspects of a program, it is rare to find their involvement in the policy development process. NGOs need to spend time and money (it does not come cheaply) in maintaining or creating relationships with stakeholders at all levels in order to influence policy.

The collaboration initiative usually comes from the NGO sector through coalitions such as CAMPE in Bangladesh and BOND in the UK. Even the UN has changed its view of NGO involvement and since 2000 there has been much greater recognition and inclusion of NGOs in its policy-making. The UK

⁴ Susan Malone, SIL International (2003), Multilingual Education Course materials

Government's DFID has also held consultations on its new education policy in development and is currently holding consultations with a wider group of development NGOs through BOND to develop its policy.

NGOs are also realising the benefit of developing networks among themselves in order to be more influential in government policy, such as VIVA Network in the UK, which now has over 600 NGO members internationally and through them, reaches 6 million children globally. NGOs can be potential allies, but they can also be formidable foes if they are joined to such international networks. NGOs can encourage government participation in its activities. They are capable of bringing all the actors together creating linkages from grassroots to government and donor. The only problem with this is that if NGOs become too comfortable a part of government activities will they continue to be able to present a challenge?

Experiences in collaboration

The relationship usually evolves from one of suspicion to one of providing information, to one of collaboration, where there are regular forums for sharing and mutual learning.

Relational continuum

Confrontational I	Ignore I	Inform I	Seek approval I	Cooperative I
Actively opposing	passive	positive	affirmative	constructive

The following shows the “range of NGO perceptions of government's ideal role in mother tongue literacy in PNG” taken from Susan Malone's work:⁵

Government should take no active role		Government should take supporting role			Government should take leading role
Government provides political climate only	Government provides funding	Government helps with developing curriculum and classroom materials	Government trains trainers, teachers, writers	Government helps with planning local and provincial programs	Government takes the initiative; NGOs support government efforts

In India, although the initial plan came from a collaboration of local and international NGOs and academic institutions, the government has taken the initiative in developing the programme. Because of the complexity and scope of the context, it would be impossible for NGOs alone to implement the programme. Educational change requires change at institutional and policy level. However, there are some major challenges when working with government:

- **Bureaucracy:** Everything with government takes time – at least in the initial stages. Confirmation of plans, approval for proposals and disbursement of funds do not happen quickly. Meetings arranged are cancelled because of another priority – politics changes with the wind.

⁵ Susan Malone, SIL International (2003), Multilingual Education Course materials

- **Changes in personnel:** Officers heading departments are frequently moved without warning. This can cause friction and disputes. The Secretaries of Education and Tribal Welfare are the most important in this case. A new officer entering the position may not take the same interest in the programme and the relationship has to begin again.
- **Finances:** Governments will rarely fund the involvement of local community or NGO personnel. This means that local language helpers and community leaders may not be able to spend the time on the work and commitment may not be so high. Time and commitment to a project will often equal payment. Work for food in these regions often comes before educational needs.

Interestingly, if an NGO seeks a partnership with a government it usually means the transfer of funds from the NGO to the government. However, if the government seeks the partnership of NGO, the NGOs may be expected to support themselves.

Relationship for territory's sake

The territory in this case is improvement in the quality of and access to education in the tribal regions of AP (and possibly beyond). The need is to look at both government and NGOs, recognise the strengths and weaknesses of both and to collaborate in practical ways for the success of the common goal. Differences in perceptions and methods can cause conflict. Assumptions about cooperation may be optimistic as government and each NGO has its own views and own desires to see certain types and ways of development, certain inclusions and exclusions from the curriculum, and certain teaching methods. Although there might be tension on both sides, alliances are necessary if success is to be achieved. Effort is required on all sides to nurture and maintain relationships.

Appendix 1. Multilingual Education in India: Briefing paper

1. Languages and education

Multilingualism is a way of life in India and its complexity generates an enormous challenge for education. In order to provide a quality education, particularly for India's tribal minorities, which takes into consideration their needs as learners and the social, cultural and political milieu, the rich linguistic and cultural complexity must be acknowledged and used (UNESCO Position Paper October 2002, *Education in a Multilingual World*). A uniform system may be easier to administer and manage, but as Shaeffer (Bangkok 2003, p4) noted, "most formal systems... are inappropriate for, or even hostile to, indigenous minority groups..." creating a barrier to learning achievement, access to further education, participation in national life as well as causing the death of linguistic and cultural diversity.

2. The Indian context

Since most tribal languages have not been officially recognised, and few have been scripted, written literature and curricula have never been developed, and are not used in any official capacity, including education. Even so, the Constitution of India and the India Education Policy state that every child has the right to learn in his/her mother tongue. The Constitution of India, under Article 350A states that *'it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.'* The National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2000 states that *'the medium of instruction ideally, ought to be the mother tongue at all the stages of school education. In the case of learners whose mother tongue and the regional languages are different, the regional language may be adopted as the medium of instruction from the third standard'*.

Education, however, is generally conducted in the major state languages and tribal children, who are not familiar with the language of instruction, are at a disadvantage from the start. Teachers rarely speak the community language, or appreciate the children's traditional culture. Added to this, teachers have had no training in teaching minority language children and children are taught as first language speakers. Where mother tongue speakers are trained as teachers, the curriculum is often too "dense" (Interview with teachers, Adilabad District, AP, Nov 2003). The drop out rate and illiteracy among many of India's tribal communities is high.

While it is essential to know the state and national languages in order to contribute to the wider community and for employment, to do so at the exclusion of the mother tongue is not only causal factor in the demise of tribal languages and cultures, but also creates a crisis in tribal children's sense of self-identity (UNESCO position paper Oct 2002). Tribal languages and cultures, and children's identities are being marginalized and ignored in the current education programme. As education becomes more widely available and the state (or national) language is imposed as the only language of instruction, tribal languages and cultures will rapidly lose ground. This can lead to more complex social problems such as demoralisation, alcoholism, crime and suicide (S. Malone, Bangkok, November 2003).

3. Previous research

The ML Education (ML Ed) programme recommended in this paper is based on a large body of research, which clearly demonstrates the importance of building a strong educational foundation in a child's first language if they are to be successful in education in the second (see UNESCO's Position Paper, 2002). A review of the literature from around the world reveals a large number of studies dealing with issue of quality education for minority language children. The following sections cite a few of the studies over the past decade. Also included are quotations from individuals who have been involved in and/or affected by minority language education.

3.1 From the literature

The consequences of forcing minority language children into majority language education programmes:

Dr. John Waiko, Vice Minister for Education in Papua New Guinea, a country of four million people speaking over eight hundred languages and himself a Mother Tongue speaker of one of the minority languages, argues that:

The failure of formal education for indigenous minorities [is] well understood by indigenous peoples all over the world. The so-called drop-out rates and failures of indigenous people within non-indigenous education systems should be viewed for what they really are—rejection rates (John Waiko, Papua New Guinea Vice Minister of Education (1997). Keynote Address, 1997 Wagani Seminar, Papua New Guinea.)*

**PNG's current education program has established 3-year Mother Tongue "elementary classes" in over 350 of the country's 820 languages.*

St. Clair identified several specific problems for minority groups in India:

Tribal language speakers are at disadvantageous position ... because their mother tongue is not represented among the state languages, it is not utilized by the state nor represented in the educational system." [This means] that minority languages suffer attrition and loss, tribal identities shift in allegiance to more dominant state languages, and the language needs of the masses are replaced by the concerns and dictates of bilingual elites (St. Clair, 2002).

Pattanayak has reported these same problems in India and elsewhere.

Use of language can become a major factor in creating unequal societies in multilingual contexts. As long as this inequality persists education cannot be conflict free. The assumption that variation is disintegration is unfortunate. Such an attitude equates different with deficient. It must be emphasized that it is not the recognition, but non-recognition of different identities that leads to disintegration. Multilingualism can thrive only on the foundation of respect for the different. (Pattanyak, 1990)

As a result of its own work among minority children, UNICEF is also aware of the negative results of ignoring children's Mother Tongue in school:

In a situation where the parents are illiterate ..., if the medium of instruction in school is a language that is not spoken at home the problems of learning in an environment characterized by poverty are compounded, and the chances of drop-out increase correspondingly.' (Education for All: Policy Lessons From High-Achieving Countries: UNICEF Staff Working Papers, New York, UNICEF)

3.2 General findings on the role of language in education

The role of children's first language (Mother Tongues) in their educational development has been discussed by a number of respected researchers and educators (e.g., Baker, 2000; Cummins, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Thomas and Collier, 2002). The following is a summary of the findings from these and other researchers over the past decade:

- When the mother tongue is promoted in the school, children's abilities in both the majority and minority languages are increased. Bilingual students perform better when the school effectively teaches the mother tongue and, when appropriate, develops literacy in that language.
- A well-implemented bilingual programme can promote literacy and subject matter knowledge without any negative effects on children's development in the majority language.
- Bilingual children have a deeper understanding of language than do monolingual children. They have more practice in processing language, and in using it effectively. Intellectual development is not compromised by use of L1, rather the opposite.

- Children are limited to reading and writing in L2 if L1 is not learned, which can often be a hindrance to expression.

4. Education theory

Educationalists agree that the most effective way to learn concepts and other languages is through the mother tongue. There are however, various ways to implement MT or ML Education.

4.1 Models of ML education

An “additive” programme is desirable – that is, an approach to language which adds the state and national/international language to initial teaching in the mother tongue, rather than a “subtractive” approach which replaces the mother tongue with the state or national language in most domains. A significant change from the current “submersion” model of education (i.e. state language only) to ML Education that supports and gives status to the home language is essential. Many tribal languages are likely to be lost within two or more generations as state and national languages take over through the spread of “schooling” (Fishman 1990).

A programme, which starts in the mother tongue, introducing second and third languages first orally and then in written form, is suggested. Although there are successful programmes introducing two languages (and even scripts) simultaneously this is not advisable as most MT teachers, usually having less training, are not equipped to teach 2 languages simultaneously. It is better to introduce first oral L2 and then L2 literacy providing a strong foundation and good bridge.

4.2 Teaching methods

On the whole teachers are trained to conformity and submission with no encouragement to be creative or to adapt their teaching to the students or the socio-cultural situation. A paradigm shift among the teachers is required to break the strong tradition of rote learning, and to encourage an activity-based language experience approach, which focuses on meaning and comprehension. Even where strong direction is necessary, particularly with teachers who have had less training, the inclusion of activities that promote meaningful reading and writing (experience, stories, etc.) are essential.

When being taught in the state language only, children are rarely involved in the learning, they are quiet, shy and lack confidence. The difference in classrooms using the mother tongue is enormous. “When the students recognize the respect for and use of their language and culture, their overall development makes leaps forward. As one teacher said, ‘It used to be that I couldn’t get my students to say a word, now, I hardly can get a word in’.” (Linda Orr Easthouse, Wycliffe Canada-LEAD, 2003 on the Quechua, Peru). Active learning is likely to be more effective, particularly for tribal children who have no previous understanding of schooling but have learned through doing for generations.

5. Conclusion

The general conclusions are that:

- It is better to learn to read in a language with which the child is familiar, and
- It is better to use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction:

There is much research, which shows that students learn to read more quickly when taught in their mother tongue. ... Students who have learned to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than do those who are first taught to read in the second language. ... In terms of academic learning skills ... students taught to read in their mother tongue acquire such skills more quickly’ (Mehrotra, S. 1998, Education for All: Policy Lessons From High-Achieving Countries: UNICEF Staff Working Papers, New York, UNICEF, cited in UNESCO Position Paper 2002).

... when learning is the goal, including that of learning a second language, the child's first language (i.e. his or her mother tongue) should be used as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. ... The first language is essential for the initial teaching of reading, and for comprehension of subject matter. It is the necessary foundation for the cognitive development upon which acquisition of the second language is based' (Dutcher, N. and Tucker, G.R. 1997)

A ML Education programme helps to:

- maintain local languages and culture
- provide a more effective education for minority language children
- contribute to a decrease in the dropout rate
- provide a smoother transition to state and national languages
- increase access to secondary and higher education.

The proposed programme will build on what has been learned in previous studies to develop an educational program that provides opportunities for success for children of minority language communities in India.

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