



ASIA-PACIFIC
MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION
WORKING GROUP

Terms of Reference (as of 7 September 2017) Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE WG)

Terms of Reference for the Asia Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, under the Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030 + (TWG on Education 2030+)

1. Background

Over the past several years, there has been a growing awareness of the difficulties that many ethnolinguistic¹ communities face in gaining access to educational opportunities, as well as increased interest in the potential of multilingual education to address lingering disparities.

In 2004, a group of organizations began meeting as the Bangkok Multilingual Education Working Group with the purpose of “identifying the major needs in nurturing a multilingual education movement throughout Southeast Asia and coordinating human and financial resources to help meet those needs.”² The founding members included: UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, Save the Children, SIL International, Mahidol University, and CARE. Given the mandate of the group, it has formally established as “Asia Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE WG)”³ under the auspices of the Regional Thematic Working Group on Education for All (TWG-EFA) as a thematic sub-group in 2009. Through integration with the Regional TWG on EFA, it has been instrumental in creating a strong regional momentum towards achieving education for all by creating a more vibrant MTB MLE community, promoting positive policies and enhancing Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) knowledge base.

Particularly the MLE WG’s ‘International Conference on Language and Education’ series and high-level policy forum on MLE have provided a unique opportunity for policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, and development actors to share views, good practices, and experiences, as well as to explore issues concerning the importance of MTB MLE and broader language issues in sustainable development. With the five international conferences and the two high-level policy forums, the MLE WG was able to reach over 1,600 participants including 38 high-level government officials in the region. Using over 350 cases presented during the past five conferences, the MLE WG was able to publish key advocacy materials⁴ and raise awareness among high-level government officials in the region to support implementation of MTB MLE activities.

¹ A community, group or other social unit that defines itself by sharing the same language and culture

² Email documentation from the original MLE Working Group

³ Please refer TOR of MLE WG

⁴ [Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: The Key to Unlocking SDG 4 - Quality Education for All](#) (2016), [MTB-MLE: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education - Lessons Learned from a Decade of Research and Practice](#) (2014), [Why Language Matters for the Millennium Development Goals](#) (Brochure) (2013), [Why Language Matters for the Millennium Development Goals](#) (Booklet) (2012)

In response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 4), the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE WG) will build on the work of the MLE WG under the framework of TWG on Education 2030+. As one of the sub-groups of TWG on Education 2030+, the MLE WG will play a key role in promoting MTB MLE to achieve SDG 4 - “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” While the original MLE WG specified a focus on the Southeast Asia region, the MLE WG will cover members from Asia and the Pacific region for the purpose of broadening participation and impact.

2. Goal

The goal of the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working group (MLE WG) is to promote multilingual education (MTB MLE) and remove language barriers to promote inclusive quality education learning outcomes for ethnolinguistic communities⁵ in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. Functions:

A. Coordination of Regional Development Actors Efforts to Support MTB MLE

- i. Organize regular coordination meetings of members of the MLE WG;
- ii. Provide support to multiple agencies to work together on joint projects relevant to the mandate of the MLE WG;
- iii. Coordinate with other sub-groups of the TWG to contribute to the production of technical guidelines, and monitor programmes of agencies under the UN system in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 4; and
- iv. Assist Member States to assess and report on the status of access to quality education for ethnolinguistic groups and particularly regarding SDG indicator 4.5.2⁶;
- v. Conduct outreach with regionally-focused organizations with relevant interest and/or expertise to become involved with the MLE WG;
- vi. Coordinate and link with regional (e.g. International Mother Language Institute) and national MTB MLE networks;
- vii. Strengthen partnerships with regional networks (e.g. Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood, United Nations Girls Education Initiative), and different agencies; and
- viii. Expand the engagement with members of the Pacific region.

B. Advocacy for Supportive Policies and Practices that Facilitate MTB MLE

- i. Hold region-wide events (conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.) that build capacity and raise awareness on multilingual education with policy makers and practitioners;

⁵ The special focus of the MLE WG is on those groups that are most vulnerable to language barriers in achieving their education and development goals. While ethnic and linguistic minorities are of particular interest, the emphasis is on marginalized, unreached groups regardless of minority status.

⁶Thematic indicator 4.5.2: Percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of Instruction. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/sdg4-metatdata-global-thematic-indicators.pdf>

- ii. Encourage/advocate creation of national MTB MLE networks (or working groups) in countries throughout the Asia-Pacific, encouraging national level capacity for coordination, advocacy and resourcing around MLE; and
- iii. Enhance awareness of how MTB MLE intersects with other sectors.

C. *Knowledge leadership and management*

- i. Play a knowledge leadership role through supporting joint publications on MTB MLE;
- ii. Serve as a clearinghouse for information sharing regarding MTB MLE trends, methodologies, and activity mapping throughout the region;
- iii. Promote innovative practices by serving as a repository platform for documents and publications of good practices and resource materials in language and education;
- iv. Undertake regional and national level mapping and/or analysis regarding the context of, and interventions related to, ethnolinguistic communities around issues such as Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis on MTB MLE;
- v. Build a Knowledge Portal for knowledge sharing at the regional, sub-regional and country level; and
- vi. Promote linkages for those involved in language and education at local, national, regional and international levels, for the purpose of developing a “community of practice” on MTB MLE for sharing lessons learned, identifying innovative approaches, etc.

4. Organization:

- i. The MLE WG will be co-chaired by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok) and United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF-EAPRO);
- ii. UNESCO Bangkok will serve as the secretariat of the MLE WG;
- iii. The MLE WG will meet on a quarterly basis (4 times per year), with the venue rotating as per the agreement of the members. Sub-committees providing planning and implementation support for a particular working group activity will meet as needed in addition to the regular MLE WG meetings;
- iv. The core members of the MLE WG include: UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, CARE Cambodia, Save the Children, SIL International and Mahidol University. The MLE WG will open participation to representatives of other concerned UN agencies, intergovernmental bodies, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral agencies, as appropriate;
- v. The MLE WG will strive to increase its membership through inviting greater representation from other CSOs, the private sector (e.g., Corporate Social Responsibility programs) and academia to enhance the exchange of knowledge and research within the region;
- vi. The MLE WG will submit technical documents and reports on activities to the TWG as often as necessary, in line with the agreed upon timeline and calendar of events;

- vii. Participation in the MLE WG is open to both institutions and individuals, with the cost of participation being met by each agency or individual;⁷ and
- viii. The MLE WG will review its progress and mandate on a biennial basis, making adjustments as needed.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the MLE WG, please email Ms. Kyungah Bang [at] k.bang@unesco.org and iqe.bgk@unesco.org.

⁷ At present there is no fee to participate in the MLE WG. The cost of participation referred to in the TOR is in regards to transportation and accommodation costs incurred by those attending MLE WG meetings or events.

Disclaimer: This ToR is a living document and subject to revision. There is a survey in progress and this ToR will be revised based on the survey result. Whenever the ToR is revised, an email will be sent to all MLE WG mailinglist informing members and indicating what has been revised. This version of the ToR was generated on 7 September 2017.