9. Community involvement and government support

9.0 Preview

While the various components of an MTB-MLE programme discussed in the previous chapters are important on their own account, two further aspects play a distinctive role to play in the programme due to their macro-level functionality. These aspects are community involvement and government support respectively.

Community involvement is one of the most important aspects of an MTB-MLE programme. The present chapter presents a detailed description of the need for community involvement and ways of ensuring such an involvement in general terms as well as at a more specific level of the Singpho community. Section 9.2 highlights the need for community involvement in an MTB-MLE programme. The nature and different stages of community involvement in such a programme are examined in Section 9.3. In this regard, three important stages of such a programme are discussed — Mobilization and awareness raising, planning and implementation. Section 9.4 introduces the major aspects of community involvement in the context of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme. It also brings to light the challenges and issues encountered in the process of working for the involvement of the community. Section 9.6 focuses on the vital issue of participation and ownership in the context of the involvement of the community in such a programme. The final section (Section 9.8) discusses the need of the active involvement of the government for the success of such programmes. In this context, this section presents some examples of government initiatives in support of such programmes in different parts of the world.

9.1 Community involvement

The community is the most important and the central stakeholder in an MTB-MLE programme. In fact, the context of need for such programme for the community
indicates the close bond between the two. Active participation of the community in the MTB-MLE programme is very crucial in order to ensure that adequate educational provisions for their language are made. This also serves to explain why the community understands the need for such a programme is needed for themselves, and why they loyally participate in each and every aspect of the programme. Eventually, it is the community that takes the sole ownership of the programme. This is an ideal definition of community involvement in MTB-MLE. However, a lot of challenge and obstacles have to be faced and negotiated before the community is able to take ownership of such a programme. The following sections will deal with the reasons and nature of community involvement in MTB-MLE. An attempt is also made to anticipate the possible challenges and issues that may need to be confronted in the specific context of Singpho MTB-MLE.

9.2 Need for Community involvement

Community involvement is one of the most important and vital prerequisites for MTB-MLE programmes. Such programmes have the following aims:

9.2.1 Creating awareness

There is a need to create awareness among members of the concerned community about the necessity and benefit of MT education for their children. It is invariably seen that most of the indigenous communities do not perceive the poor academic performance of their children as a problem which can have a possible solution. Instead, they just accept it as an inevitable fact that neither their children have the capacity to perform well in academic terms, nor are they privileged enough to get quality education. Therefore, in order to challenge this perception, there is an urgent need to mobilise these communities towards an understanding of the basic reasons for the poor educational performance of their children. A related aspect of such a Mobilization effort is to spread the awareness that MT education can bring a lot of change into such a situation.

9.2.2 Promoting indigenous knowledge

This refers to the effort to bring all the indigenous local knowledge that the children are familiar with to the classroom. The design of MTB-MLE makes it possible for maximum involvement and participation of the community
members at all the levels of the programme. This results in the written and oral dissemination of indigenous local knowledge to the children in the form of written reading materials produced in the material production workshops. At the same time, through teachers training programmes, the teachers acquire strategies on how to encourage the students to talk about their existing knowledge of their own culture and environment. This encourages the children to come to the class since they find themselves in a familiar situation which builds up their confidence to participate in classroom interaction. In this regard, the relatively senior and knowledgeable members of the community have to be involved in the process of incorporating local knowledge into the curriculum.

9.2.3 Fostering ownership

A further aim of an MTB-MLE programme is to create a sense of ownership among the members of the concerned community towards the programme. The active involvement of the community members serves to bring a sense of belonging towards the programme. This is the main lifeline of a community based MTB-MLE programme. Without this sense of ownership, it is impossible to sustain such a programme over a long period of time. There have been many instances where a number of programmes have had to close down abruptly due to the lack of adequate community involvement and of the sense of ownership resulting from such an involvement. The most disturbing aspect in such situation is that once suspended, the institution or initiative loses its credibility in terms of its utility and capacity in the eyes of common people.

9.3 Nature and stages of community involvement

The various aspects of MTB-MLE programmes undergo some degrees of modification according to the nature, need and aspirations of the community. The following sections deal with the nature and stages of community involvement in an MTB-MLE programme under the following headings: Mobilization and awareness raising (9.3.1), planning (9.3.2) and implementation (9.3.3)
9.3.1 Mobilization and awareness raising

Mobilization is an initial but important aspect of the programme which needs to ensure the maximum possible participation of a particular community. The success of the programme largely depends on the correct understanding of the members of the community about the necessity and benefit of that programme for their community. This goal becomes possible only through massive mobilization in the form of informal talks, formal meetings, surveys on language attitude, language loss, students’ performance in the mainstream schools etc. In most cases it is observed that during the mobilization programme, a group of members of the community becomes interested in the programme and volunteers to work for setting up such a programme. During this initial phase of the programme, it is the responsibility of the facilitator of the programme to explain all the issues relating to MT education to such interested community members. The eventual aim of this effort is to form a nucleus of workers from within the community so that they can assume ownership and lead the Mobilization programmes in the subsequent stages. While forming this group, it is important to ensure that the Mobilization process draws upon the diverse range of strengths present in various sections of the community. In other words, this core group should adequately represent every section of the community:

- *The young and the old*

  The group should comprise of members from both the young and the old generation of the community. The old members of the community can provide valuable and practical suggestions and information about various challenges that might come in the way of running such a programme. Equally, they can contribute towards the programme by contributing their traditional knowledge and community-specific insights which can be incorporated into the various reading materials prepared for the programme. The younger members, on the other hand, are always energetic and full of enthusiasm. They can be innovative in terms of planning and executing different aspects of the programme. Their comparatively greater exposure to the wider world can instil a new and sophisticated spirit in the programme. At the same time, these young
members can also provide valuable feedback on the kinds of difficulty that they faced during their schooling in the mainstream schools.

- **Inclusion of parents**
Parents in general and especially mothers should be included as members of this group. The intuitive knowledge of the mothers in particular, serves to add a valuable perspective to the programme. It helps in formulating a practically achievable plan for the programme. Therefore, it is important to include a number of parents in the core group. In the subsequent stages, these parents can play a greater role in terms of mobilising and explaining the essence of MT education to other members of the community. The attachment of the mothers to their children can bring a great deal of valuable insight to the overall planning of the curriculum and other aspects of the programme.

- **Community leaders**
Leaders of the community who generally holds influence over the population should be included in such a group. However, while doing so, such leaders should be apprised of the need and benefits of the programme in detail so that in subsequent stages they can advocate the programme both inside and outside the community.

- **Language expertise**
It is also important to look for members with a certain amount of knowledge about the language used by the community - its rules at various levels (phonological and grammatical) including the knowledge of the orthography being used (if one already exists). It is also useful if they have some knowledge about the differences that might exist between the variety used by that community and the other varieties of the language. Such persons are a real asset to the programme since they can provide much valuable information and insight into the study of the language. This kind of knowledge resource is necessary for bringing out different teaching-learning materials in the language.

Once this group of people develops an understanding of the essence of the programme, they can lead the Mobilization effort forward and this will serve to
bring a sense of ownership to the community. The presence of an outsider either as a facilitator or as an expert has its own advantages. At the same time, this could also become a cause of concern in terms of intrusion into the ethics and traditional social integrity of the community. In such situation, a group of members of community itself who are well-trained and mobilized by outside experts can actually take on the responsibilities of doing all the ground work necessary for conducting an MTB-MLE programme.

9.3.2 Planning

Involvement of the community leaders in the planning of the programme is very important as crucial decisions need to be taken regarding the programme. The basic and initial question which needs to be dealt with is whether the community actually needs and wants such a programme for their community. As mentioned earlier, in most cases the communities are not aware of the problem their children face in the mainstream schools where the medium of instruction is not their mother tongue. Community Mobilization is the process through which the issues of school drop-out and educational failure are discussed and explained to the community members. This is the stage where the community members need to discuss and think about the problem at length and decide whether they really want such a programme to improve the educational situation among their children.

Once the community decides to conduct an MTB-MLE programme, the first important step to be taken is to discuss and plan the programme. During this discussion, the facilitator should be able to draw the attention of community members to different requirements of the programme. Moreover, the members should be briefed about the possible challenges that might come in this regard. This is also the time for the community to decide what type of MLE programme they want to conduct for their community. The nature of MTB-MLE programmes can differ depending on the different needs and reasons behind the decision of the community. A few of these differences in the programmes are discussed below.

- In certain instances, the community has a reasonable awareness and understanding of the issue of educational failure amongst their children. Therefore, they are motivated to start an MT based MLE programme in their
language. Their aspiration is to see their children doing better in the schools. Accordingly, they decide to send their children to the MT school for the pre-primary stage so that these children are able to build a strong MT foundation. It has been convincingly proved that with a sound MT base, these children are able to pick up lessons imparted in the state or national language faster and more effectively even though this language is different from their mother tongue. In such programmes along with the foundation in the MT, a smooth transitional phase is also incorporated in the programme. In this regard, we can refer to the investigations of the fate of language minority students in five large school systems in United State during the years 1982-1996 by Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia Collier. The report (Thomas and Collier 1997a) of this mammoth research investigation opines

'The first predictor of long-term school success is cognitively complex on-grade-level academic instruction through students' first language for as long as possible (at least through Grade 5 or 6) and cognitively complex on-grade-level academic instruction through the second language (English) for part of the school day, in each succeeding grade throughout students' schooling.'

- The community understands that their heritage language is under the threat of extinction. So they feel an urgent need to preserve and if possible revive it for their future generation. In this regard, they feel that MTB-MLE can help the community in preserving their language and also teach it to their children as MTB-MLE puts utmost stress on the incorporation of indigenous language and culture into the textbooks. Such communities believe that by means of teaching their language and culture to their children through the mother tongue in the MT school, they would be able to keep their indigenous language and culture intact. Programmes designed with such an aim incorporate different strategies for the maximum use of the indigenous language and culture of the community.

- In other instances, a community might want to assert their identity through the MTB-MLE programme. One of the major characteristics of MTB-MLE is the production of a huge number of local written materials. The availability and abundance of written materials in any
language asserts a strong status for that language community. Assertion of identity is therefore another reason that motivates communities to run MTB-MLE.

- In some cases the community's aspiration to exhibit its supremacy over other varieties of the language also motivates the running of MTB-MLE. In such cases it is seen that the whole process of providing education becomes somehow politically oriented.

### 9.3.3 Implementation

The effective and successful implementation of an MTB-MLE programme indicates a strong and active participation and eventual ownership of that programme by the community. But it requires a great deal of cohesive efforts by the community members in executing all the steps decided upon in the community dialogue process. Looking at the scheme of things, the implementation of an MTB-MLE programme can be examined in terms of two stages. These stages are discussed below.

#### 9.3.3.1 Implementation before the start of the school

There are certain tasks that need to be accomplished before starting an MTB-MLE programme with a strong foundation. Some of these are discussed below:

- **Holding material production workshops**
  
  As stated earlier, an abundance of mother tongue literature is a strong predictor of a successful MTB-MLE programme. In order to produce an adequate amount of reading materials which can be used as teaching materials in the MT school, a series of material production workshops should be conducted for the community. The participation of efficient writers and other knowledgeable members of the community can result in the production of a good number of children's story books, picture books, charts, primers, pre-readers, posters, song books, rhymes, riddles etc.

- **Appointing teachers**
  
  The community needs to appoint at least two teachers initially for running the programme. In this regard, the members of the selection committee
should be well aware of the qualifications required for the teachers. The selection of these teachers can be a challenge for the community for certain reasons. One of the prominent reasons may be that most of the members of the community do not actually know how to read and write their own mother tongue even though they are able to speak it fluently. Another challenging factor related to the selection of the teachers may be the availability of someone who can actually devote the required amount of time to teach the children. This is because the duty of the teacher in the MTB-MLE programme is not limited only to the teaching. The teachers need to perform certain other duties ranging from keeping records of the students' performance to the production of reading materials. The issue of providing remuneration for the teachers is also another grave challenge that the selection committee has to keep in mind while selecting the teachers. It is quite possible for someone to offer voluntary service as teacher in the MT school at an initial stage of the programme. But this arrangement cannot be continued for long. Therefore, the challenge before the selection committee is to find someone who can initially offer voluntary service to the school. This gives the community a little time to find some means of paying the teachers.

- **Holding teacher training programmes**
  Once the teachers have been selected, they need to be trained on the methodology of teaching the children through their mother tongue through a learner-centred approach in MTB-MLE programme. This requires a number of training sessions for the teachers. The community should arrange such training sessions with the help of the facilitator.

- **Finding a plot of land or building for the school**
  The community has to think of a possible place where the school can be built or the classes can be conducted. In this regard, the community leaders can call for a general meeting and discuss about the issue at length. A number of positive outcomes may result from such meetings.
  
  (1) Someone from within the community may offer his/her plot of land for constructing a school building.
(2) Some community member may be interested in offering his/her vacant building to be used as the school building.

(3) The community may also decide to approach the local government or a private school in the area to seek permission to use a room of the school for after-school sessions.

(4) The community may also approach some local NGO or club for permission to use their room for providing MT education to their children.

(5) The community may also decide to use the community hall (if there is one) for conducting classes for the MT school.

(6) The community can also think of approaching some sympathizers outside the community and seek donations (in cash or kind) for constructing the school building.

- **Enrolling students**
  
The community leaders and the members of the core group of the programme need to talk to the parents in the community and motivate them to send their children to receive education in the MT school. This can also be done as a part of the Mobilization programme.

- **Forming a School Management Committee (SMC)**
  
A strategic step to be taken by the community is to form an SMC for the smooth running of the school and also for the programme. The community needs to take every precaution in selecting the members for the SMC as the overall progress of the programme and the actual smooth running of the classes depend a great deal on the active planning and implementation skills of these members. Active SMC members can contribute to the overall success of the programme. The various responsibilities of the SMC include

(i) Ensuring the smooth functioning of classes

(ii) Maintenance of the school in terms of financial and infrastructure requirements

(iii) Maintaining a smooth relationship with the parents of the learners and collecting feedback
(iv) Keeping the rest of the community abreast of the progress as well as the challenges faced by the programme and seeking ways of improvement

9.3.3.2 Implementation after starting the school

After the school has been started, there are certain strategic steps that need to be implemented to ensure the successful running of the programme. These are as follows.

- **Supervision of the school**
  The community should appoint an eligible person to supervise the school on a regular basis. The supervisor will keep records of students’ enrolment, teachers’ attendance, necessities such as furniture, stationery items etc. He/she is responsible for maintaining a regular contact with the parents of the children who come to the school.

- **Training for the SMC**
  The community can arrange for short-term training programmes for the SMC members. Such trainings are aimed at creating awareness among the SMC members about their duties and responsibilities. These events can also serve a platform for the SMC members as well as other community leaders for discussing different challenges they might be facing and finding some possible solutions.

- **On-going material production**
  The community should take measures to produce more reading materials for the school. This may require coordination among the writers, artists, editors and teachers in the programme. This is a crucial step since there will be increasing demand for new books and other reading materials as the school progresses.

- **Continuous documentation and evaluation**
  Systematic documentation and on-going assessment of all the aspects of the MTB-MLE programme is essential for maintaining the quality of the programme. Therefore, the community should also take it as part of its responsibility to document each step of the programme. It
can also set up a certain framework for assessing the quality and appropriateness of the books, teaching methodology and other facilities in the school.

9.4 Involvement of the Singpho community

The discussion of the different aspects of community involvement in an MTB-MLE programme so far has been at a general level. The present section will consider this issue in the light of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme where the role of the researcher has been that of a facilitator. An attempt will be made to give an account of the involvement of the members of the Singpho community in all the stages of the programme. The discussion will highlight the different approaches adopted by the community towards planning and implementing the programme, and the effectiveness of such approaches. The issues to be covered include mobilization and awareness raising (9.4.1) and involvement in planning and implementation (9.4.2).

9.4.1 Mobilization and awareness-raising

9.4.1.1 Survey

The first instance of community involvement took place through two surveys which were conducted during April-May, 2006. Both surveys aimed at achieving the following main objectives:

1. Collecting baseline data

Collecting a set of baseline data in terms of demography, education, communication, and other relevant and available information relating to the Singpho community. A realistic plan for an MTB-MLE programme for the community needs to be based on this kind of information.

2. Sensitizing the community

Sensitizing the community members about the significance of mother tongue education for their children. In this regard, this survey worked as a means of getting the community members to think about the status of their language and about the issue of academic failure of their children.

3. Surveying language attitude

Finally, a language attitude survey to specifically get an understanding of the community’s attitude towards the languages in use. This aimed at
gathering information and opinion on how they view their own language and the dominant language.

The two surveys gave the researcher the opportunity to individually talk to each family in the village and to gain an insight into their thoughts about their own language. The outcome of the survey has already been discussed in 4.1. A noteworthy aspect of the community’s involvement was found to be the eagerness of each member of the community to talk about and discuss the issues raised during formal as well as informal interviews. Many of the parents and older people expressed concern over their children’s inability to retain and use more than half of the indigenous vocabulary. They realized that the knowledge of the younger generation about their own culture and tradition was gradually weakening. As a result most of the members actually responded positively when asked for their opinion about the necessity of a school for teaching the heritage language to their children.

9.4.1.2 Community Meetings/ dialogues

After the survey in October, 2006 the first community meeting was held to discuss two issues. One was the linguistic and cultural loss of the community and the other was the issue of the educational failure of their children. This meeting was attended by a large number of community members including leaders, old and young members, religious heads and quite significantly, some of the mothers in the community. After detailed discussion on the relevant issues the meeting decided in favour of starting an MTB-MLE programme for the children of their community. The meeting also formed a committee under the heading of ‘Singpho Multilingual Education Programme Committee’ and entrusted this committee with the task of taking all the necessary steps for establishing a MT school for Singpho children.

9.4.2 Involvement in planning and implementation

The involvement of the community members during the planning and preparation has been significant. There has been active participation of community members in all the workshops and training sessions held during the period between November
2006 and July 2011. The following sections focus on the participation of the community members in these events.

9.4.2.1 Workshops/trainings

Since the essence of MTB-MLE lies in the incorporation of local and cultural knowledge of the children in teaching educational concepts, it is apparent that such a programme needs a lot of local expertise in preparing its materials. This is obviously not possible without the support of the members of the community. In the case of the Singpho MTB-MLE, there has never been a dearth of community participation and involvement.

A group of 8 young members of the community participated in the first Mobilization workshop which was held in Guwahati, (500 kms. away from their village) in November 2006. This was the first exposure of the Singpho community to an MLE-specific workshop.

Other workshops for material production were held locally in the village. A large number of participants turned up and actively participated in producing reading materials for the programmes. Most significant of these was the first material production workshop, held locally at Ingthong of Margherita in September, 2008. This workshop was attended by a large number of mothers from the community who provided important input in preparing the Cultural Calendar for the programme. As many as 15 beautiful books on stories, songs and rhymes were written and made into book forms within a span of three days.

The Ingthong workshop was followed by a number of other workshops that were successful in terms of producing primers and pre-readers and other reading materials. Since orthography is one of the most challenging issues in the Singpho MTB-MLE programme, the community leaders and knowledgeable members attended a series of meetings and workshops in an attempt come to a consensus regarding some of the contentious orthographic issues. These efforts resulted in the modification of the existing orthography in a desired direction.
The community selected four teachers initially to participate in two teachers training events. One of these was a pre-service training and the other one was an in-service training.

A workshop on producing reading materials on Environmental Studies (EVS) was conducted in Ketetong from 8 to 11 July, 2010. This added another dimension to the programme. This workshop witnessed an overwhelming participation of the young and educated members of the community. As a result, two objectives were achieved at the time: a good number of EVS materials were produced, and a group of young members of the community was also mobilised.

9.4.2.2 Administrative responsibilities

The community has seriously taken up the necessary administrative responsibilities. The Singpho Multilingual Education Programme Committee has taken up the task of appointing teachers for the school. In this regard the committee took into consideration the different selection criteria for MLE teachers.

The committee also formed the School Management Committee (SMC) in order to run this school smoothly. In this regard, the SMC has been entrusted with the responsibility of effectively implementing the MLE curriculum in the school.

9.4.2.3 Selecting a venue for school and constructing the school building

The active involvement of the community in the programme has resulted in the construction of a beautiful building for the Singpho MT school. Rajib Ningkhee, a learned community member, very generously donated some land along with a old building for the school. With the active support received in the form of cash and manual labour, the community renovated the building. During the process of renovating the building, the community exhibited extraordinary commitment and adopted certain strategies to avail assistance from both inside and outside the community. With the help of the facilitator, the community prepared a brief advocacy write-up about the Singpho MTB-MLE programme and passed it on to different people and business firms seeking help for the
renovation work. This yielded the desired result, and a number of outsiders came forward to help the community in renovating the building. The MTB-MLE classes started here from the 9th September, 2009.

In another instance of local involvement, the community leaders, in consultation with the facilitator, approached the local Army base and applied for assistance for the school. This community-led initiative resulted in the form of the computer lab with five computers that was presented to the school by the Mountain Brigade of Indian Army.

Teachers' honorarium is one of the major practical issues usually faced by all MLE programmes. In this regard, the some members of the Singpho community have offered to contribute towards the salary of the teachers with personal donations.

Sustainability of the programme is invariably a serious concern for all MLE programmes. The Singpho programme is no exception. One of the sustainability measures taken by the Singpho community is its decision to use the computer lab as a source of earning for the school. It was decided that the computer lab would be used both as a means of imparting basic computer education to the community members and also for generating some revenue for the school.

9.5 Issues and challenges

In spite of their strong commitment and involvement, the community, especially the Singpho Multilingual Education Programme Committee (SMEPC) and the SMC have faced a number of challenges in the functioning of the programme. The following sections will focus on some of these practical problems.

9.5.1 Lack of confidence of parents on the MT school

Even though the parents and other community members have actively participated in all the programmes relating to the Singpho MTB-MLE programme, they are yet to be convinced about the benefit of the programme. The fact that the school runs only for two hours each day, gives an impression
that this is not a real school. Therefore the parents prefer to send their children both to the nearby English medium school as well as the MT school. This has created a number of practical problems for the programme. Firstly, the attendance of the students in the school has not been regular. Since the parents consider it as more as a tutorial class, there has not been a compulsion to send their children to the class on a regular basis. Secondly, the decision of the parents to send their children to two different schools in the morning and again in the afternoon has created problems of transportation for the children. This is because the parents do different jobs for their livelihood. The problem becomes more serious in the winter season as it gets dark soon and the children cannot travel along back home.

9.5.2 Dependence on the facilitator

The excessive dependence of the community on the facilitator for conducting the programme raises serious problems for its sustainability over the longer term. This has hindered the momentum of the programme to some extent. Due to the strong rapport between the community and the facilitator (the present researcher), they have developed a habit of waiting for the facilitator to start any work even when it can actually be done by the community themselves. This is one of the main factors for the slow progress in producing advanced materials for the programme. Because of a sense of dependence, the writers, the illustrator and the editor continue to need and expect guidance from the facilitator in producing more reading materials.

9.5.3 Excessive social responsibilities on core group members

Over the last six years, the Singpho community has received a great deal of publicity as one of the most culturally vibrant communities of Northeast India and as a pioneering tea growing community of Assam. As a result, there has been a heavy responsibility on the leaders of the community to keep up to their reputation. Unfortunately, since there are not many people in the community who can take up such responsibilities, these end up with the handful of learned members of the community who form the core MLE
members. As a result, these members are overburdened by such responsibilities and get little time to physically administer the programme. This has resulted in a kind of vacuum in the workflow of the programme and has hindered the involvement of the rest of the community. These are some of the main issues which need to be addressed in order to sustain the programme for the benefit of the community.

9.6 Participation vs. ownership

It is seen that the two issues of community participation and ownership are often dealt with together in MLE-related discussions. While dealing with the two, it is useful to take into account the fine line of difference between community participation and ownership. The difference between these notions can be indicated as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Community involvement

As Figure 8 shows, participation is one form of community involvement. At the initial stage of development of an MLE programme, community members actively participate in the all events such as workshops, training events, and mobilization drives etc. At this stage, quite often a facilitator from outside the
community calls upon the latter to get together for these events. The members of the community also respond by actively participating in the various events.

On the other hand, ownership refers to a relatively later stage when a community comes to have a better understanding of the philosophy of the programme. As a consequence, it develops an interest in running the programme by themselves. This is the stage where the community takes control of the various aspects of the problem. This is possible only when the community understands the benefits of the programme enough to run it by themselves and for themselves.

In the case of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme, community participation seems to be much stronger than their sense of ownership. However, as I stated already, this programme is still in its developing stage. Therefore, it is still early days to pass a judgment on any part of the programme.

The strong commitment of the Singpho community towards the MTB-MLE programme has been much evident in the way the programme has developed since its inception. However, there is still a need for more mobilization among the community members. Such Mobilization drives need to go beyond the group of community members who are actively involved in the programme at present and should permeate through each and every level of the Singpho society. There are a number of people in the community who are yet to understand the benefit and the necessity of this school and the programme. Therefore an important task ahead of the SMC and SMEPC is to make an all-out effort to reach out to those people including parents and explain to them the benefits of the programme.

9.7 Involvement of the government

The national or the state government is one of the important stakeholders for any MTB-MLE programmes. Active support of the government for such a programme can expedite the progress of MTB-MLE programme. One of the best examples of Government involvement is the case of Papua New Guinea, where a great number of languages out of the 800 different languages have been recognised as mediums of instruction in the schools that are serving different communities. This process of introducing vernacular medium schools for the indigenous groups started from the 1980's when the North Solomons Provincial Government introduced the VilesTok
Pies Skul (village vernacular schools) in two languages. This effort of the government was assisted by Summer Institute of Linguistics International (SIL), an NGO that assisted the community in developing reading materials in their MT. Later, this movement expanded to cover 250 languages by 1993.

In the same way, government support to the First Language Education Project implemented in the Lubuagan Kalinga language of the Northern Philippines has become instrumental in establishing and sustaining a strong MTB-MLE programme.

In India, this mode of teaching has been being implemented in two states – Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. In AP, MLE was started in 8 tribal languages in 2003 and in Orissa, MLE was taken up for 10 tribal languages in 2006. Both states have the programme in over 500 schools.

As far as governmental involvement in India is concerned there are a number of constitutional provisions which facilitate mother tongue education for the children of linguistically disadvantaged indigenous communities in the country. It has been clearly stated in the Article 359 (A) 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, 2005 argues for:

"an emphasis on the recognition of children's mother tongues, including tribal languages, as the best medium of instruction." (p.vii)

It goes on to say that:

...multilingual proficiency... is possible only if learning builds on a sound language pedagogy in the mother tongue." (p.vii)

In addition to these stated positions, The Rights of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 not only guarantees education for all up to the age of 14, but also recommends education in the mother tongue.

These constitutional provisions have made it possible for states like Andhra Pradesh and Orissa to launch MTB-MLE in a planned manner. For instance, Andhra Pradesh is including over 2300 schools in the MLE project, while Orissa is
planning to add 500 more schools into the programme. However, such an initiative is yet to take off in Assam. The main reason for delay is the lack of sufficient Mobilization and advocacy of MLE in the state government departments, especially in the education department.

There have been a few initiatives to promote MLE in the state. The Singpho is one of the prominent instances among them. Apart from Singpho, MLE initiatives have been taken for the Rabha, Amri-Karbi and Adivasi communities in Assam. However, all of these are the result of constant facilitation by literacy experts from international and regional NGOs. The Singpho MTB-MLE is the direct result of the present doctoral study. It has covered some significant ground to ensure strong community participation in the programme. At the same time, such programmes could have been run far more effectively had the government taken some interest. Active support of the government can help these programmes in sustaining the painstaking efforts of the concerned communities.

In an ideal situation, the government

- would understand the relevance and benefit of implementing MTB-MLE programmes for minority language communities in the State
- would provide each such programme with necessary support in terms of infrastructure and financial support for sustaining the programmes
- would work with the NGOs and persons who are already working with the communities on MTB-MLE programmes
- would provide these existing MLE efforts with necessary government aids for organizing workshops and for paying the salary for the teachers.

However, in terms of the present reality, it appears that the essence of MTB-MLE for linguistically disadvantaged minority communities has a long way to go before it can hope for proper attention from the state government. In this regard, it has become extremely important to run extensive advocacy drives in support of MTB-MLE, with credible documentation of some of these pilot projects which are underway. Securing the involvement of more local MLE practitioners is another task that needs to be accomplished. There is an urgent need of trained MLE activists to help and guide more and more communities who will be coming forward to take up this programme for the benefit of their children.
9.8 Overview

This chapter has been concerned with the issue of community involvement in an MTB-MLE programme. It began by discussing the need, nature and stages of community involvement. This was followed by a detailed discussion of community involvement in the context of the Singpho MTB-MLE programme. Finally, the need for active government support and cooperation for the success of such programme was highlighted.