

Storybooks in Mother Tongue for ECCD

Global evidence suggest that Mother Tongue Based Education benefits disadvantaged children, including children from rural communities and girls who have opportunity to learn in their mother tongue tend to stay longer in school, achieve better and repeat grades less often. (UNESCO, 2005).

Myanmar is diverse with over 135 ethnic groups with more than 135 spoken languages (Bradley 2015), along with sign languages, dialects and foreign languages (Bradley 1997; Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2013). As Myanmar, majority ethnic group's language, is used as language of instruction in school and as official language, for many young children, the preschools (ECCD Centers) play essential role to practice their mother tongue outside home.

The *Myanmar Policy for Early Childhood Care and Development (2014)* identifies importance of mother tongue in its **Strategy 4** which states "Implement and expand high-quality, culturally and linguistically-appropriate and inclusive preschool education, continuing parent education and involvement and related early childhood services, and conduct awareness raising workshops from community to national levels regarding the importance of preschool education."

UNICEF with Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and supported 90 ethnic language and cultural committees to develop bi-lingual (in ethnic and Myanmar languages) illustrated big story books to promote early learning in mother tongue. Altogether 832 illustrated story books were developed of which 582 books were printed by the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs and distributed to 66 ethnic groups (including Myanmar) as story books for family use. We would appreciate the usages of storybooks for all the children, especially for the children in the most disadvantaged area. Therefore UNICEF, with the support of Korea Nat COM to reproduce the web-version of the ECCD storybooks developed with the ethnic language and culture committee. We do hope that these storybooks would widespread among children, parents and caregivers.

These storybooks will help to understand how to use bi-lingual story books effectively, to stimulate children's love of reading first and gradually to become rich in vocabulary and develop strong foundations in their mother tongue. Once the children are proficient in their mother tongue, children will be ready to learn official Myanmar language. These story books will be very helpful in bridging to learning Myanmar as children are already familiar with the content of the story, hence can easily reflect while learning Myanmar language.