

Brief Note on the Language Support Program.



In the last three years, our program has provided language support to children in Assamese medium Government primary schools, in 50 villages of Kokrajhar and Chirang, two districts that come under the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) areas of Assam. The children in these schools come from various linguistic communities like Rabha, Santhali, Nepalese, Bengali Muslim and Bodo, but attend school in Assamese medium. This leads to a situation where children struggle to acquire fluency in reading and writing in Assamese, a language that they rarely hear in their day to day lives. The language problem affects learning and retention levels, and the drop out levels of children from some of these communities is very high. We have been providing these children with additional language support in both their home and school language, through teachers from their communities.

In the period from 2009 to 2013, we have worked closely with the community, particularly for the Rabha and Santhali languages, consulting language experts and teachers, to work on Teaching Learning Material (TLM) for children and training modules for our volunteer teachers specifically designed for their particular language situation. We have focussed on oral language development (in both home and school language), reading and writing abilities as well as math, so that the children are able to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in the education system. In an evaluation we carried out in February 2012 of schools with and without our program, we have seen that students from very similar backgrounds are able to perform better with additional language support.

In the 4 schools in Chirang district with Santhali children, where our program was being implemented, about 49% of the children were able to read a simple paragraph in Assamese, as compared to a mere 7% of children in case of the 4 schools with Santhali children who are not supported by our program. Despite the many challenges of working in an area, where the political situation is often quite volatile, we believe our program is making a difference to the children and program teachers, in their ability to negotiate the many languages of the school environment.