

## **Language for Life: A statement on the importance of mother tongues for national prosperity**

Our mother tongue is arguably the most valuable inheritance that we receive from our ancestors. Mother tongues are the essence of our ancestors' understandings of the world around them, which enabled them to thrive in and contribute to their local eco-systems and contexts. Our mother tongues contain the names, meanings, and purposes of things and practices that exist in our environment, which may not exist in other languages or contexts, and provide us with insights and guidance for the living of our lives. A loss of mother tongues is a loss of our collective inheritance.

Current language policies and practices across Pakistan have created an environment where masses of people are left with little choice but to abandon their mother tongues. This loss of mother tongue is a contributor to the current state of our (national) disharmony, economy, health, and environment.

A loss of mother tongue leads to social disharmony because the younger generations are no longer able to talk to or learn from their elders. A loss of mother tongue contributes to disharmony because it creates negative sentiments amongst the people whose languages are disempowered.

A loss of mother tongue contributes to a weakened economy because people become dependent on jobs in other languages, in which they are often marked as 'non-native' speakers. A loss of mother tongue implies that people often need to move to other locations for employment, which impacts both the individuals and their communities.

A loss of mother tongue leads to health issues because people lose names, properties, and uses of native herbs, plants, minerals, and other local resources. A loss of mother tongue contributes to community health problems because communities lose an understanding of Indigenous practices that helped maintain their health and well-being.

A loss of mother tongue contributes to environmental problems because we lose understandings of our local eco-systems. A loss of mother tongue leads to a loss of knowledge about how we contributed to the well-being of all living and non-living things around us and we, therefore, fail to serve our environmental roles.

Mother tongues are our language for life. As Pakistan continues to develop policies and practices that undermine the value and contribution of our linguistic inheritance, we become poor and lose our direction, values, roles, and responsibilities.

With understandings of language and its implications for our life, society and economy, the Linguistics Association of Pakistan urges our communities, government, and others to take actions to reverse the current trends and provide resources to restabilise the use and learning of all mother tongues across the country. This reversal does not imply that we do not develop and/or learn languages of wider communication. However, if we fail to stabilise the use of local languages, Pakistan will continue to be plagued by problems embedded in colonial-era practices that continue to empower our colonisers and not our peoples.

*Drafted by Ahmar Mahboob on behalf of the Linguistics Association of Pakistan  
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