The Juba Conference in Language-in-Education in South Sudan: Concluding Statement of Principles.

Academics from across Sub-Saharan Africa and experts from ACALAN UNESCO, UNICEF and SIL met in Juba in March 2012 for a British Council conference on Language-in-Education policy in South Sudan. Our research and our discussions have resulted in the following statement of general principles which we believe should be applied in South Sudan and elsewhere. These principles are aligned with the Policy Guide on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education Systems, which was adopted by Ministers of Education of 18 African countries following a conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 20-22 January 2010 and subsequent exchanges. They are also aligned with the Khartoum Declaration on the link between Culture and Education adopted by the 6th Summit of the Heads of States and Government of the African Union held in Khartoum, Sudan, from 16 to 24 January 2006; and with the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015) launched during the Second Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF) between 4 and 7 September 2006 in Maputo, Mozambique.

As professionals in the fields of language and education, we reaffirm our belief in the following principles that should be applied to language-in-education policies and practices across Africa. We commit to championing these principles within our own organisations and the wider community.

- We believe in linguistic equity: All languages must be protected, respected and developed.
- We value the multilingual nature of African society. It is a resource to be celebrated and used.
- African languages should be used in partnership with international languages such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, both through strong models of mother tongue-based multilingual education and throughout African society.
- Parents, the state, and civil society must be informed of the educational, social, cultural, economic, and political benefits of the use of African languages alongside European languages and included in discussions concerning multilingual education.
- Learners should be taught in basic (i.e. up to lower secondary level) formal and non-formal education through the language they know best. This gives them the best basis for developing academic language proficiency required in all subjects. Unfamiliar languages should be taught through second language teaching methodologies.
- Other languages (including further African languages or European languages) should only be used as a medium of instruction after learners have developed academic reading and writing competency in the language they are familiar with, and after they have gained a sufficient level of academic proficiency in the second language through studying that language as a subject. This principle applies to all languages that are not a learner’s mother tongue. When
the language education model chosen requires transition from one language-of-instruction to another, that transition should be gradual and not sudden.

- Effective teaching, with a socio-culturally relevant curriculum, is the most important element in quality education. African societies should use a variety of ways to develop and value good teachers.
- The teaching of reading and writing is particularly important and must be improved – increased training is needed in this area.
- Non-formal education should form part of the education system. It includes community based early childhood education, alternative basic education for out-of-school children, youth and adults, and skills training for youth and adults. Effective approaches use bi/multilingual language models and are connected to the community and world of work.

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