



Association
pour le développement
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en Afrique

“Advocacy is no longer enough: we must move on to the next stage”, ADEA’s Executive Secretary declares at the opening of the Conference on the integration of African languages in education

Ouagadougou, 20 January 2010 – The African Conference on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education was opened today in Ouagadougou by Burkina Faso's Minister of Basic Education and Literacy, Ms. Odile Bonkougou, in the presence of the ADEA Executive Secretary, the Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), Kenya's Deputy Minister of Education – representing the Conference of African Ministers of Education (COMEDAF) – and Burkina Faso's Deputy Minister with responsibility for Literacy and Non-Formal Education.

Ms. Bonkougou stressed the importance of this conference, describing "the promotion of languages, multilingualism and linguistic diversity in conjunction with cultural diversity" as the "leaven in the reform of African education systems". "Language and culture", she said, "are vital levers for human social integration and participation in local and global development". Noting that more than 2,000 languages are spoken in Africa, Ms. Bonkougou expressed her regret that these languages are still satellites of foreign official languages and "stagnating at the margin of national systems, at the risk of gradually losing their richness and disappearing". She reviewed the obstacles to the adoption of policies in favor of African languages, congratulating the countries that have succeeded in overcoming them. She also mentioned the promising experiences of bilingual education in her country's literacy and non-formal education programs, whose excellent results have led Burkina Faso to adopt a plan for gradual scaling-up.

"We all agree that it is high time that African languages were taught and integrated into education", stated the COMEDAF representative, Mr. Patrick Ayiecho Oliveny, Kenya's Deputy Minister of Education. He reminded participants that African heads of state have supported policies aimed at integrating African languages into education systems at all levels. "These policies will improve educational quality and access, but will also enable our countries to forge an identity that is not based on European languages", he continued. Mr. Oliveny also noted that learning the *linguae francae*, such as Kiswahili - spoken in Eastern and Central Africa - would broaden the learners' opportunities for employment on the African market.

The ADEA Executive Secretary told participants that the conference represented the culmination of a long process that involved capitalization of many experiences in the use of African languages as teaching vehicles, study of the feasibility of implementing such policies and practices, and awareness-raising directed at technical and financial partners. He added that this process had also led to the African Union's inclusion of the promotion of African languages and cultures as a priority area of its Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa. Mr. Byll-Cataria stated, lastly, that the conference objective was to produce a policy guide to help decision-makers meet the challenges involved in implementation of bilingual and multilingual education policies and programs. Mr. Byll-Cataria also declared that an Inter-Country Quality Node would be formed to allow collaboration and exchanges of experience between countries.

The Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), Mr. Adama Ouane, placed the theme of the conference at the heart of efforts for the development of multi-cultural societies, respectful of diversity and producers of knowledge. He insisted on the fact that numerous studies have proven the effectiveness of using local languages for improving learning outcomes and the adverse consequences of current policies based on the belief that the major international languages are the only paths to upward economic mobility. He deplored the fact that Africa remains the only continent where the majority of children start school using a foreign language, affirming that "Africa's multilingualism and cultural diversity are assets, not a burden". "We recommend that policies and practices in Africa encourage multilingualism, based mainly on the mother tongue, leaving adequate room for international languages" he declared.

The conference, jointly organized by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and Burkina Faso's Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy, will run until 22 January, bringing together 26 African countries, cooperation and development organizations, education and language experts and researchers.

The main outcome expected from the meeting is the adoption of a policy guide on the implementation of reforms aimed at implementing multilingual education and the use of African languages as media of instruction.

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