



Association
pour le développement
de l'éducation
en Afrique

Ouagadougou Conference Adopts a Policy Guide for Successful Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education

Ouagadougou, 22 January 2010 – The participants at the Conference on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education adopted today in Ouagadougou, after three days of deliberations, a policy guide aimed at affirming the vision of multilingual and multicultural education as the general education system in African countries, with a view to the transformation of their societies. They recommended that governments take steps to ensure the "dissemination and take-up of the contents of the guide", to implement the policy guidelines and to mobilize the regional economic commissions, through the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), to "develop a strategy for the promotion of cross-border languages".

According to the guide, the policy of multilingual and multicultural education requires the following: the establishment of policy and legislative frameworks; the development of monitoring and evaluation strategies; general awareness-raising and advocacy and the development of regional networks; institutional strengthening and capacity building; evaluation of learning outcomes and monitoring; curriculum development and training; and research.

In adopting this "invaluable tool for better promotion of effective multilingual education policies based on African cultures and visions", the participating ministers, education professionals, experts and academics from the 23 countries represented wished to demonstrate that there is no technical obstacle to the integration of local languages into education systems, and that this poses no threat to education. They expressed their conviction that "the use of local languages and cultures helps to ensure access to education for all and a significant improvement in learning quality".

"Collectively and individually", said Marie Odile Bonkougou, Burkina Faso's Minister of Basic Education and Literacy, "we are responsible for capitalizing the results of our conference, while at the same time taking account of the specific context of each country and all the complexity of managing multilingualism and multiculturalism with a view to citizen empowerment, good governance and development".

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The Ouagadougou conference, she went on, "will stand in the annals of education in Africa as a milestone for significant advances toward the integration of African languages and cultures into education and training systems". She emphasized the need, in the follow-up to the conference, "to continue the exchange of ideas and to give more in-depth consideration to ways and means of implementing the recommended policies and to teaching practice, which remains the key to the success of educational reforms".

In their recommendations, participants asked governments to "facilitate the formation of partnerships with academics and the education community, and between the public and private sectors", to set up inter-country quality nodes and to put the theme of the Ouagadougou conference on the agenda of the next meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union. ADEA, UNESCO and Burkina Faso's Ministry of Basic Education will handle follow-up on the recommendations and in particular will work with countries on the implementation of the operational provisions of the guide, with support from technical and financial partners.

ADEA Executive Secretary Ahlin Byll-Cataria and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Director Adama Ouane concluded the proceedings by affirming that the results of the conference show that the multilingual movement is well beyond the initial stage of reflection, questioning, advocacy, hesitation and decision. "The evidence shows that, instead of being a problem, multilingualism is an opportunity, because language is a symbol of national identity that is rooted in culture. To promote a language is to recognize the identity of those who speak it, to acknowledge cultural and social diversity, and to appreciate the value of diversity, which helps to consolidate national unity."

The conference, jointly organized by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and the Burkina Faso Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy, recognized that the promotion of African languages and cultures is, on one hand, a factor of national social cohesion and of regional and continental integration, and on the other, an essential means of transforming African societies with a view to balanced, sustainable economic and social development.

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