



Association for the Development of Education in Africa

Press release

ADEA, GTZ and UIE to organize a conference on bilingual education and the use of African languages in education in Windhoek

Paris, July 27, 2005: Next week, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), the German cooperation agency (GTZ) and the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Namibia and the *Agence intergouvernementale pour la francophonie* (AIF), will hold a conference of experts on bilingual education and the use of African languages as languages of instruction in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The conference will be held at the Country Club Resort in Windhoek, Namibia, August 3-5, 2005.

Many specialists from a variety of backgrounds will take part in the conference, including linguists, education specialists, experts in communication, academics, publishers, senior officials of education ministries, and representatives of development agencies from seventeen African countries (Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia) and countries from other regions (France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States). Five professors from African and Northern universities will contribute their expertise (the University of Cape Town, South Africa; the University of Ibadan, Nigeria; the University of Leipzig, Germany; the University of Oslo, Norway; and Alliant International University, United States), as will the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN). In addition to the organizers, several development agencies that support education in Africa will also attend, including the Irish cooperation agency, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC). Also participating in the conference will be two regional and sub-regional organizations, CONFEMEN (*Conférence des ministres de l'éducation ayant le français en partage*) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as two ADEA working groups: the Working Group on Books and Learning Materials (WGBLM) and the Working Group on Communication for Education and Development (WGCOMED).

The conference will be officially opened by the Minister of Education of Namibia at the Country Club Resort in Windhoek on the morning of August 3, 2005.

Research has shown for the past fifty years that the use of African languages in education is a vital issue for the development of relevant and effective African education systems. It has been demonstrated that mother-tongue instruction and bilingual education are important factors in the improvement of learning processes. Studies conducted by ADEA show that in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia, pupils in bilingual schools perform better than those in monolingual schools in the principal subjects, namely mathematics, sciences and languages, including French and English.

Nevertheless, many stakeholders in education, including African ministers of education, still doubt the value of mother-tongue and bilingual education, and do not encourage the development of these practices. A majority of African countries continues to favor use of the official language – a foreign language (English, French, Spanish or Portuguese) – as the primary and in some cases only language of instruction.



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In view of the situation, and conscious of the importance of this matter for the development of education in Africa, ADEA, GTZ and UIE decided to organize this conference of experts in order to advance the policy dialogue surrounding the use of African languages, not only at the level of governments and international organizations, but also at that of teachers and their students.

The aim of the *Conference on Bilingual Education and the Use of African Languages as Media of Instruction* is to review current knowledge on the use of African languages in the education sector in order to identify relevant issues and strategies for the development of bilingual education in African countries. The conference participants will examine the findings of a study on mother-tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa that was commissioned by ADEA in collaboration with the GTZ and UIE. The study, conducted by six education specialists, analyzes the situation in thirteen African countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia).

In addition to assessing the current situation, the conference will seek to develop a shared understanding among experts on accomplishments and challenges in this field and to make recommendations on the strategies and policies to be implemented. The conference's results and conclusions will hopefully serve to develop arguments and materials to enhance advocacy and awareness campaigns aimed at decision makers and the general public.

Another objective of the conference is to prepare for discussions on bilingually oriented education policies at the next ADEA Biennial Meeting, which will explore in greater depth the factors that determine the effectiveness of schools and adult literacy programs as well as successful and affordable initiatives for early childhood development.

A great many topics will be addressed during the conference, including language policies at the national and international levels; teaching practices at classroom level and active learning; models of instruction in African languages and bilingual education in formal and non-formal education systems; and publishing in African languages.

About ADEA

Founded in 1988, ADEA has become a partnership between ministries of education and cooperation and development agencies. One of the principles underlying ADEA's philosophy is to consider that the responsibility for educational development falls to African governments. ADEA's activities focus on policy dialogue between governments and funding agencies, among African governments themselves and among development organizations. They are also aimed at building institutional capacity in Africa by developing technical skills, establishing networks for information exchange and encouraging the sharing of successful strategies and experiences.

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