

**The Dilemma of language of  
instruction and the  
provision of mother tongue  
education to minorities**

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## **Introduction**

- Southern Africa – Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, multilingual countries
- The role a language plays to language and cognitive development; and the language and the relevance of education provided to society constantly debated
- Decision about which of the mother tongue, the lingua franca or the language of wider communication to use and what role should be assigned to local/national languages

**“Education has the power to transform lives. It broadens people’s freedom of choice and action, empowering them to participate in the social and political lives of their societies and equipping them with the skills they need to develop their livelihoods. For the marginalised, education can be a route to greater social mobility and a way out of poverty (UNESCO, Education for All Monitoring Report 2010, p.135).”**

**Nyambe (1997:42) argued as follows:**

**“... despite millions of dollars spent on curriculum reforms, the current curriculum system has persistently created and perpetuated its own evils which have continuously debilitated poverty and underdevelopment in African nations. While far from being an engine for social and economic development, the current curriculum system has been the major root source of underdevelopment.”**

- **Not only education to respond to challenges faced by marginalised communities in our respective countries**
- **A political will necessary to address needs**
- **Government established special structures to address the plight of marginalised minorities - San and the Ovahimba**

The living conditions of the San people were “tragically dire, and that they lack basic social and economic infrastructure to meaningfully participate in national development programmes”.



## Introduction

**Language is at the heart of education.**

**Through language that the intended curriculum is delivered.**

**Language is central to any discussion of development in Africa.**

**The provision of education and the availability of the mother tongue or African languages at all levels of education is fundamental to this.**

**For development efforts to be understood, the MT is the best to present and explain efforts.**

# Provision of mother tongue education

- Multilingualism regarded as an impediment to the introduce mother tongue education.
- Perceived reasons/obstacles complicating language policy formulation and implementation:
  - the low level of development of African languages
  - the lack of suitably qualified teachers
  - the 'mixed' classroom with different language speakers
  - the change-over to English medium instruction. (Davids, 2000:12)



**Provision (continues)**

**“... that no effective learning can take place in a classroom where there is no common language of communication. In the case of Namibia, we have embarked upon the philosophy of learner-centred education, whereby the child will be at the heart of every learning activity. If no proper communication exists in that classroom no imparting and acquiring of knowledge can take place.”**

Xhwaa Qubi, Naro speaker from Botswana expressed himself about education in an unfamiliar language as follows:

*“Anyone who has to struggle with the force of a new language when they enter into a new learning atmosphere would understand the confusion that is experienced ... you want to understand what is going on, but you cannot because your mind is blank. You have no words in the new language to offer expression. Soon nothing the child knows or wants to know or say matters because of this language barrier.” (Hayes, 2006:6)*

## Namibia:

- Made progress in providing mother tongue education to minorities.
- Only Ju|'hoansi offered as medium of instruction
- Language development mostly donor-driven.
- Government provides mother tongue education in early childhood and pre-primary education also San communities - Ju|'hoan, !Xung and Khwe.
- Adult literacy primers in Ju|'hoansi, Khwedam and !Xung.
- No figures are available indicating the number of San enrolments.

## South Africa:

- Khoe and San languages are recognised, but not official languages.
- Limited government funding is available for their development.
- Prah (2005) quotes Crawhall (1998) that South Africa's Khoe and San languages are at the brink of imminent extinction
- N|u extinct – only 9 speakers; revitalisation efforts with support from linguists
- Nama also revitalised in Northern Cape (Khubus and Riemvasmaak)
- !Xun and Khwe taught at Platfontein in Grade R since 2006

## Botswana :

- Building of national Botswana identity.
- Based on the use and promotion of Setswana as the primary language of its citizens.
- No provision for minority languages in primary education.
- Various projects support language development - Naro by Reformed Church
- Minorities such as Bakalanga, Bayeei, Bakgalagadi, and the San are promoting their languages



# Medium of Instruction

- Political will and interests of the ruling elite seems to be the key issues in determining language policy
- Language provision would be regardless of number of speakers
- Namibia - MTI for first 3 years of schooling
- English introduced in Grade 4
- Choice of English as medium of instruction by schools not based on pedagogical considerations
- Only 9 schools offering a San language.
- Only 431 San learners out of national total of 184 295 learners in LP Phase (about 0.2%)



# **Education provision for minorities**

- **Intersectoral Task Force to address needs of vulnerable children (1996)**
- **Schools for minorities:**
- **Ovahimba - Ondao Mobile Schools**
- **Ju|'hoan – Nyae Nyae Village Schools - taken over 2005 by government – children drop out when progressing to Tsumkwe for Grade 4**
- **Gqaina PS – mother tongue instruction in Grade 1 - low drop out rate**

# **Problems to be addressed by Task Force**

- Access to basic education
- Premature drop out
- Learners pushed out by education system
- Long distances to schools
- Poverty
- Uninformed about possible exemption from school and hostel fees

# **Integration of language and culture into policies**

- Failure to recognise cultural and language rights out of fear for tribal and ethnic tendencies
- Marginalisation negatively impact on cultures, livelihood, culture and identity of minorities
- Curriculums not responsive to inclusion and integration of traditional knowledge and practices
- Curriculum content not appropriate to environment of minorities

## **Integration of language and culture into policies**

**“Indigenous knowledge systems developed over many years and the indigenous people have utilised and managed natural resources in sustainable ways. The alienation of their resource bases robbed them of their coping strategies and put their traditional food security under strain. For pastoralists their livestock numbers had dwindled and for hunter-gatherers the game resources, wild berries, roots and honey have become inadequate (African Commission on Human Rights Report, 2005:21). ”**

## **Integration of language and culture into policies**

- **Better support and policies, sympathetic approaches and sensitisation at educational institutions on derogatory attitudes against minorities**
- **Elevation of national languages to equal status to LWC**
- **Assign functional value in government and economy**
- **Language policies should consider that language is a vehicle of cultural transmission and traditional knowledge systems**
- **Useful to transmit information in the mother tongue to people, e.g. on HIV & AIDS**
- **Cross-border cooperation**



# Poverty reduction

- Availability of vocational and other training facilities to support traditional economic base
- Access to economic and social resources
- Inadequate land and water resources
- Appointment programme or extension officers from their own people
- Low income linked to inadequate food security, inadequate housing, alcohol abuse, crime, violence and sexual abuse



## **Poverty reduction**

- **Discrimination based on ethnicity with regard to enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights persist in Namibia (Jansen, 2010)**
- **Promotion of equal opportunities for all will help to combat poverty**
- **Special hunting licences for food security – hunter-gatherer life impeded by laws and fencing in of traditional land**
- **Laws should be translated in the languages of the people**
- **Access to information a fundamental right**
- **Information in MTs would contribute to success of government programmes as people will understand and consciously participate**

# **Dominant language groups**

- San tend to speak languages of dominant groups for survival
- Can lead to loss of language, traditional knowledge, beliefs and values
- Commercialisation of their traditional land leads to invasion and encroachment by stronger groups
- Schools intended for San children are “taken over” by stronger/dominant groups
- San parents and children complain about harassment, molesting, teasing and degrading by other groups

# Conclusion

## ***Crucial issues to be addressed:***

- Creation of conducive learning environments to build on language and culture of minorities
- Training of San teachers to teach in the mother as well as English
- Education/training programmes that would strengthen economic activities
- Curriculums that would enable the development of appropriate skills to maintain their way of life
- Creation of job opportunities

To conclude:

**“We need to note that if democracy and its cultural basis are to be consolidated, the languages and cultures of mass society need to be developed as a condition for the empowerment of the broader sections of the population. Knowledge has to reach the masses in languages they not only easily understand but can also create in. These are the languages in which they interact with confidence; languages which respect their historical and cultural heritage; languages which empower them in ways which shed the baggage of cultural inferiority implicit in the adoption of borrowed languages; languages in which they can develop. ... without the use of African languages for the production and reproduction of knowledge, Africa will not develop (Prah, 2005).”**

Thank you!

Kai aios!

