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REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON A STRATEGY CONCERNING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGES IN ACHIEVING EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY

The Director-General submits a UNESCO strategy concerning the role of languages in achieving education for all (EFA) in the context of sustainable development.

The financial and administrative implications of the activities proposed for the 2008-2009 biennium are covered by the provisions of document 34 C/5. The proposed decision provides for the inclusion in the Programme and Budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/5) of the resources required for the implementation of the strategy.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 16.

I. Importance of languages in education for all

1. Basic education – from early childhood to adulthood – both formal and non-formal, must deliver quality education for all (EFA) learners by taking a multilingual approach,¹ which has great potential for achieving EFA in that it:

- (a) facilitates access to education – while promoting fairness – for population groups that speak minority and indigenous languages, in particular girls and women;
- (b) raises the quality of education and learning achievement by laying emphasis on understanding and creativity, rather than on rote and memorization;
- (c) strengthens the cognitive aspect of learning by ensuring, through use of the mother tongue, that what is learnt is applied directly in the learner's life;
- (d) increases dialogue and interaction between the learner and the teacher by providing the opportunity for genuine communication from the outset.

2. UNESCO's international instruments and language policies in the field of education, on account of their inclusive approach, specifically concern population groups that are excluded from education, such as ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, girls and women and rural dwellers. These sections of the population should enjoy the right to quality education in their own language, but that right is not always respected. At present, monolingual education, provided in a language that all learners do not master, is widespread, despite its negative impact.

II. Multilingual education for sustainable development

3. The World Declaration on Education for All provides that “every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs”. These needs comprise both learning tools and learning content. Viewed from this angle, education for sustainable development (ESD) provides essential learning tools and basic learning content required by human beings to develop their full capacities, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning (Jomtien, 1990, Article 1, para. 1).

4. In this endeavour, the right to quality multilingual education for all must be guaranteed, for, in order to understand and act to promote sustainable development, learners must have access to education in their mother tongue and in other languages. Local languages, in particular minority and indigenous languages, are means of transmitting cultures, values and traditional knowledge. Multilingual education facilitates participation and action conducive to sustainable development by giving access to new knowledge and new cultural expressions, thus ensuring harmonious interaction between global and local issues.

III. Strategy concerning the role of languages in achieving education for all (EFA) in the context of sustainable development

5. Various factors crucial to a successful multilingual approach and some of the key roles of Member States are set out below.

Selection of languages of instruction in a multilingual context

6. In many environments, learners speak several languages and it is often difficult to select languages of instruction. It is therefore of prime importance to ascertain the sociolinguistic situation in a given environment, in other words, to analyse which languages are used by whom and for which purposes, in order to determine which language of instruction should be selected.

¹ Multilingual education entails the use of three languages – the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language (as detailed in 30 C/Resolution 12 “Implementation of a language policy for the world based on multilingualism”, adopted by the General Conference in 1999).

Role of Member States:

Conduct a careful analysis of the sociolinguistic situation in consultation with stakeholders concerned such as learners, parents and school officials. It is often a good solution to select a common language that is close to one or more other languages used. When the learner's language cannot be used as a language of instruction, a language with which he or she is also familiar may be selected, but not a language that is completely foreign and poorly known.

Demonstration of the feasibility, potential and advantages of a multilingual approach based on education provided in the mother tongue

7. The population's support for a multilingual approach is vital and must be promoted when policy-makers and ministerial officials formulate an education policy conducive to a multilingual approach.

Role of Member States:

- (a) Launch a mass awareness-raising campaign and advocacy activities, through the traditional and electronic media, in order to promote a multilingual approach.
- (b) Formulate a holistic language policy, which is essential at country level to a coherent multilingual approach in education. Such a policy will reflect educational challenges proper, as well as socio-economic, political and cultural considerations.
- (c) Conduct pilot experiments likely to demonstrate the merits and educational effectiveness of the approach.

Ensuring the sustainability of multilingual education

8. In regard to challenges relating to human and financial resources in the implementation of a sustainable multilingual approach, technical and financial support and the government's political involvement are crucial.

Role of Member States:

- (a) Incorporate an education policy conducive to the multilingual approach into all strategic or development policies.
- (b) Organize human resources training and deployment in a manner consistent with the particular requirements of a multilingual policy.
- (c) Schedule an evaluation of the relevance and impact of the curriculum and possibly a review in the long term.

Harmonization of educational goals and curricula with local cultures and contexts

9. Learners must be able to make the connection between learning attainments and their needs and priorities in daily life. The question of the relevance of the syllabus and of the use made of knowledge must therefore be considered.

Role of Member States:

Promote local or decentralized school-based governance that involves the local population in the organization and management of the formal or non-formal curriculum and educational resources. The community itself will thus play a role in selecting the languages used in

education and, in particular, in identifying the content and skill that are best reflected and learnt in the local language.

Appropriate training for educators and teachers

10. Educators and teachers must be trained to play their role effectively in a multilingual and multicultural environment. The teacher must not only know the local language of instruction, the pupils' sociocultural background and the usual language of communication, but must also be able to teach in a language that is familiar to learners and in another language, using appropriate teaching approaches.

Role of Member States:

Provide appropriate training to prepare teachers and educators for mother-tongue and multilingual education, which require radically different methods. It is also important to take appointment decisions in the light of the languages that teachers and instructors master.

Linguistic development to promote sustainable multilingual education

11. Development of the mother tongue is often neglected and doubts about the language's capacity to fulfil educational functions may grow. This matter must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny in order to ensure that the multilingual approach will be sustainable.

Role of Member States

Support research and studies on the linguistic development of local languages (standardization of the writing system, lexical development, grammatical description and so on).

Sustainable provision of learning material and textbooks

12. Each learner – child or adult – needs access to learning materials in local languages to reflect local cultures. The local community's participation in the design and content of such materials, desktop publishing and use of local publishing facilities can contribute to the production of appropriate materials at reasonable cost.

Role of Member States:

Support production in local languages in close collaboration with local stakeholders and the ministries concerned.

Enriching the literate environment

13. The literate environment is the sociocultural setting in which reading and writing achievements are put into practice. The role of the various languages in part determines the nature of that environment and opportunities for its enrichment in a manner likely to facilitate cultural expression, access to information and the production and dissemination of written materials (printed or digital).

Role of Member States:

Ensure that the learner and the teacher have access to materials in the mother tongue and in the other languages used and promote the drafting and publishing of texts in the languages concerned.

IV. Role of UNESCO

14. UNESCO's activities consist mainly of awareness-raising, advocacy and technical support for Member States. In regard to the multilingual approach, the Organization will:

- (a) develop an "educational kit" to assist Member States in formulating a holistic language policy and in becoming aware of the interaction among the various social fields in which language choices play a key role;
- (b) continue to ensure collection of good practices and studies in the field of multilingual education and literacy, disseminating them on the Education portal and through publications. A study on early childhood and education in the mother tongue will be published in the UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood series;
- (c) increase support for the local production of learning and reading materials, such as textbooks, in local languages and, outside the school setting, promote dynamic policies to enrich the literate environment through expanded written expression in the languages concerned (newspapers, Internet sites, books, and others), taking an intersectoral approach to that end.

V. Financial and administrative implications

15. UNESCO's contribution to the implementation of the strategy, as detailed in paragraph 14, does not entail any additional financial and administrative obligations under document 34 C/5. Should the Executive Board recommend that the strategy be adopted, the resources required in order to continue to carry out the activities described in paragraph 14 will be included in the provisions of the Draft Programme and Budget for the 2010-2011 biennium (35 C/5). In the light of the extrabudgetary resources that may be raised, UNESCO could increase its support at country level for the national implementation of the strategy. A special account could be established to manage such extrabudgetary resources.

VI. Action expected of the Executive Board

16. In the light of the foregoing, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a draft decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 181 EX/9,
2. Encourages the Member States to allocate funds, within the national budget or from external funding for EFA, for the implementation of national language strategies designed to achieve EFA in the context of sustainable development;
3. Recommends that the Director-General include the relevant components of the strategy in the Programme and Budget for the 2010-2011 biennium (35 C/5);
4. Requests the Director-General to establish a special account for the implementation of the strategy;
5. Invites the Member States to make voluntary contributions to the special account.



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CORRIGENDUM

“Summary”: paragraph 2 should read as follows:

The financial and administrative implications of the activities proposed for the 2008-2009 biennium are covered by the provisions of document 34 C/5. The proposed decision provides for the establishment of a special fund for the implementation of the strategy, and invites the Member States to make voluntary contributions to the special fund.

“V. Financial and administrative implications”: paragraph 15 should read as follows:

15. UNESCO's contribution to the implementation of the strategy, as detailed in paragraph 14, does not entail any additional financial and administrative obligations under document 34 C/5. The resources required in order to continue the activities described in paragraph 14 have been included in the provisions of the Draft Programme and Budget for the 2010-2011 biennium (35 C/5). Depending on the extrabudgetary resources that may be raised, UNESCO could increase its support at the country level for the national implementation of the strategy. A special fund might be established to manage such extrabudgetary resources.

“VI. Action expected of the Executive Board”: the draft decision in paragraph 16 should read as follows:

16. In the light of the foregoing, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a draft decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 181 EX/9 and Corr.,
2. Encourages the Member States to allocate funds, within the national budget or from external funding for EFA, for the implementation of national language strategies designed to achieve EFA in the context of sustainable development;
3. Requests the Director-General to establish a special fund for the implementation of the strategy;
4. Invites the Member States to make voluntary contributions to the special fund.