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Universal Primary Education In Multilingual Societies

Supporting its Implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

25 years of experience in German Technical Cooperation

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Germany's Technical Cooperation

Working Document
DRAFT

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Acronyms and abbreviations

EU	European Union
BMZ	Bundesministerium fuer wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung *(Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development)*
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit *(German Development Cooperation)*
Ife	Primary Education Research Project
KfW	Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau
MoE	Ministry of Education
OAU/AU	Organization for African Unity
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
U.S.A.I.D	United States Agency for International Development

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1.   The Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) is the primary implementing agency in the field of technical assistance of the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ). GTZ implements co-operation agreements in the sectors particularly relevant for the social, economic and political development of the respective partner countries.

2.   This document presents the longstanding experiences of the German Development Cooperation (GTZ) in providing technical support for UPE in multilingual societies – the detours and challenges as well as the successes. The first part of this document resumes the history of BMZ/GTZ support to various governments to bring about Education for All in multilingual societies. This overview is followed by a presentation of political and technical references which form the framework for GTZ support. In part two the document presents the most important lessons learnt in 25 years with particular attention to Africa, comparing them with some of the respective international research findings and experiences of other development partners.

3.   This paper is not meant as an academic stocktaking. It is a summary of past experience and lessons learnt from a practical point of view in development cooperation. These experiences draw from extensive research, which, over the course of the last 30 years, repeatedly confirmed the importance of native language instruction for better learning outcomes. This research has been summarized in the respective publications (Dutcher & Tucker, 1996, Malone, 2001).

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. *"All agree that the single most important key to development and poverty alleviation is education"*. This statement by James D. Wolfensohn echoes an earlier statement made by OAU/AU *"aware that illiteracy is an obstacle to the economic, cultural and social development of African countries …"*.

5. Because of its key role in the fight against poverty, Universal Primary Education became one of the 8 Millenium Goals to be achieved by 2015. Consequently it is an important reference for the definition of German development policy.

6. From the beginning of GTZ's support to educational systems of developing countries 25 years ago, the question of the medium of instruction was a key issue. This is not a surprise given the fact that 80% of all nations world wide are multilingual. Quite a number of these societies in Latin America and more so in Africa south of the Sahara still have not found a convincing answer to deal with that challenge in primary education.

7. Be it primary education in, Peru, Bolivia, Madagascar, Niger, Ghana or any other developing country GTZ was working for, the language of instruction at primary level was a language unfamiliar to many children.

8. But any educationist knows: as long as children are taught in a language unfamiliar to them primary education is not taking place because *"education is organized and sustained **communication** designed to bring about learning"*.

9. Consequently *"promoting intercultural bilingual education and/or instruction in the mother tongue"* became increasingly important for the German contributions to Universal Primary Education.

10. The 25 years of experience with the promotion of intercultural bilingual education and/or instruction in the mother tongue mainly in South America and Africa South of the Sahara allows GTZ to draw some major conclusions and to share them with stakeholders of primary education in multilingual societies.

11. The overwhelming experience is the technical feasibility of intercultural bilingual education and/or instruction in the mother tongue.

12. The feasibility is documented in a considerable number of textbooks and teachers' guides written in numerous south American and African languages, in adapted curricula and syllabi, in tutors and teachers trained in the use of these curriculum components and in evaluations testifying the educational success.

13. The reasons for the criticism of the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction are more or less the same world wide.

14. The common denominator of these reasons are misconceptions on teaching of a language sometimes called "myths" in the specialized literature and the politicization of the language policy which Jean Calvet elegantly formulated as follows: *"The war of languages is always part of a wider war"*.

15. Literacy and numeracy for all should not be a privilege of monolingual societies –, a minority world wide by the way. Since 1978 literacy for all has proven feasible in multilingual societies of Sub-Saharan Africa as well. The blind alleys and the avenues are known and bilingual education seems to be the main avenue. As some African countries have shown in the past and some others show at present, the information, the technical know how and the necessary funds are available.

16.	What is not needed are further pilot projects to demonstrate, yet again, the evidence. What is needed is the firm will of the governments concerned to guarantee Primary Education not only to the same "happy few" but to all those with an indigenous or African language as mother tongue.

3. BACKGROUND:
POLITICAL AND TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. The institutional learning process.
From equipment to UPE

17.　　Germany began supporting native language instruction in 1978 with assistance to the Peruvian Government to implement bilingual education for its indigenous population. The start of this project marked a clear change of focus for German support to the primary education sector. A strategic shift had been made away from equipping MoE's and their agencies with material (mainly by developing their printing capacities) towards developing policies and core curriculum components for basic education in multilingual societies. It is worth noting that this move was triggered by the publication of results attained through bilingual education in Québec (Lambert, 1978) and more so by the success of the Nigerian Ife Project, 1970-78, (Fafunwa et al., 1989) which effectively realised UNESCO's recommendation of 1953 to use mother tongue as medium of instruction.

18.　　The attempts of multilingual societies to reach UPE, the growing awareness inside and outside the concerned countries and the rapid proof of its technical feasibility led to a further commitment on the part of Germany to provide technical assistance in this field.

19.　　GTZ increased its technical support to bilingual education in Latin America beneath the umbrella of the Convenio Andrés Bello (a cooperation of Andean countries, e.g. Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador etc. in the cultural and educational sector). It expanded its support to Sub-Saharan Africa a couple of years later.

20.　　Twenty-five years later the GTZ continues to support UPE in Latin America's multilingual societies and Sub-Saharan Africa. After the first educational projects with African languages as the medium of instruction – Madagascar and Rwanda in the 80ies and 90ies – current support for the implementation of respective national policies is to be found in Namibia, Ghana, Niger, Chad, Uganda, Mali, Malawi and most recently in Mozambique.

3.2. The framework

3.2.1. Political references

▪ **Education is key to development**

21.　　After the first conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 German technical and financial contributions to the development of primary education increased significantly. The motivation behind this increase can be summarised by James D. Wolfensohn: *All agree that the single most important key to development and to poverty alleviation is education.*

22.　　In these few words Wolfensohn captures the numerous research findings which indicate a clear relationship between education, in particular primary education, and economic, social and cultural development. A similar statement has been made by the OAU/AU identifying *illiteracy as an obstacle to the economic, cultural and social*

development of African countries … (OAU/AU, 1986). Lockheed and Verspoor offer a summary of the respective findings (Lockheed et al., 1991).

23.   Because of its key role in the fight against poverty, Primary Education became also one of the 8 international development Goals to be achieved by 2015. Consequently, it is an important reference for the German development policy.

▪ **Multilingualism is the rule and not the exception**

24.   Contrary to conventional wisdom monolingual nations worldwide are in the minority. 80%, the overwhelming majority of all nations, are multilingual, including the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Portugal – the former colonial powers in Africa.

25.   Multilingual societies are the norm. Monolingual societies are the exception. UPE takes place first and foremost in multilingual societies. It is the efforts of the respective governments and their development partners which will decide the success or failure of UPE by 2015.

3.2.2.   Technical references

▪ **Education is communication**

26.   In its contribution to the World Education Forum, Dakar 2000, BMZ not only reconfirmed the key role of primary education within German development policy but recognised the direct link between EFA and teaching in the mother tongue or in a language familiar to the child. "*In the 1990s, the policy focuses shifted and broadened and now are concentrated mainly on providing comprehensive assistance in the subsector, ...promoting intercultural bilingual education and/or instruction in the mother tongue….*" (BMZ Spezial, 2000). This vital link can be found again in a communication from the EU commission to the council and the European Parliament on education and training and poverty: *The language of learning (in particular the mother tongue) plays a key role in access to education and its quality* (EU commission, 2002, Brussels).

27.   Both institutions recognise education as synonymous with communication as stated years ago by UNESCO's Division of Statistics on Education:

> *"Education is organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning".*

28.   Under the particular historical circumstances in many multilingual societies, Primary Education for All is first and foremost a question of introducing communication in the classroom. This means introducing or enhancing the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and science as well as all other subjects in the respective languages of these societies.

29.   The first evidence for the effectiveness of teaching in the mother tongue – at least for Africa – was given by the Ife Primary Education Research Project conducted in Nigeria between 1970 and 1978. The results of this research are clear: The cohort taught in Yoruba throughout the six years of primary school achieved significantly better results in all subjects than its counterparts from the control group (Fafunwa: 1989).

30.   This is particularly important for the teaching of the official language. Below are the performance results in English obtained by the Ife Project

Table 1 **Nigeria: Results of 1976-1979 tests in English language, six year primary project**

	Urban schools				
	PE	**PC**	**PrE**	**PrC**	**TC**
Primary 3 (1976)					
English Oral	3.7	4.2	3.5	1.7	5.5
English Reading	4.9	4.3	5.5	6.5	8.1
English Writing	6.8	5.9	5.5	5.7	8.0
Primary 4 (1977)					
English Language	59.1	42.2	43.9	38.7	40.7
Primary 5 (1978)					
English Language	76.9	55.4	64.7	58.6	59.5
Primary 6 (1979)					
English Language	72.10	68.56	70.25	67.32	52.35
	Urban schools				
	PE	**PC**	**PrE**	**PrC**	**TC**
Primary 3 (1976)					
English Oral			0.0	2.4	1.3
English Reading			11.8	3.3	3.6
English Writing			2.4	2.5	2.5
Primary 4 (1977)					
English Language			41.6	34.0	27.9
Primary 5 (1978)					
English Language			69.4	50.9	30.5
Primary 6 (1979)					
English Language			65.72	58.32	42.73

Note: See previous page for key for types of groups: PE, PC PrE, PrC, and TC.
Source: Fafunwa, Macauly, and Sokoya (1989). Education in Mother Tongue: The Ife Primary Education Research Project.

(PE=Pilot Experimental, PC=Pilot Control, PrE=Proliferation Experimental PrC=Proliferation Control, TC=Traditional Control)

31. As did other institutions (see Dutcher, 1995 and Malone, 2001) GTZ evaluated the results of its bilingual or monolingual projects in Peru (Hornberger, 1985), Madagascar (Komarek, 1993) and Niger (Bergmann, 1999).

32. The international findings contradict the popular belief that teaching in the mother tongue hampers the teaching in the official language. To the contrary they rather suggest that the teaching in the mother tongue is a prerequisite for the quality of teaching the official language.

▪ **Reading performance is determined by the mother tongue**

33.　　　　In 2000, OECD organised a comparative study of educational achievements in 32 of its member states focusing on the reading performance of 15 year old students: *Programme for International Student Assessment*. In its report the German working group published a path analysis illustrating the determents for the reading competency of the target group (*PISA 2000: 501*).
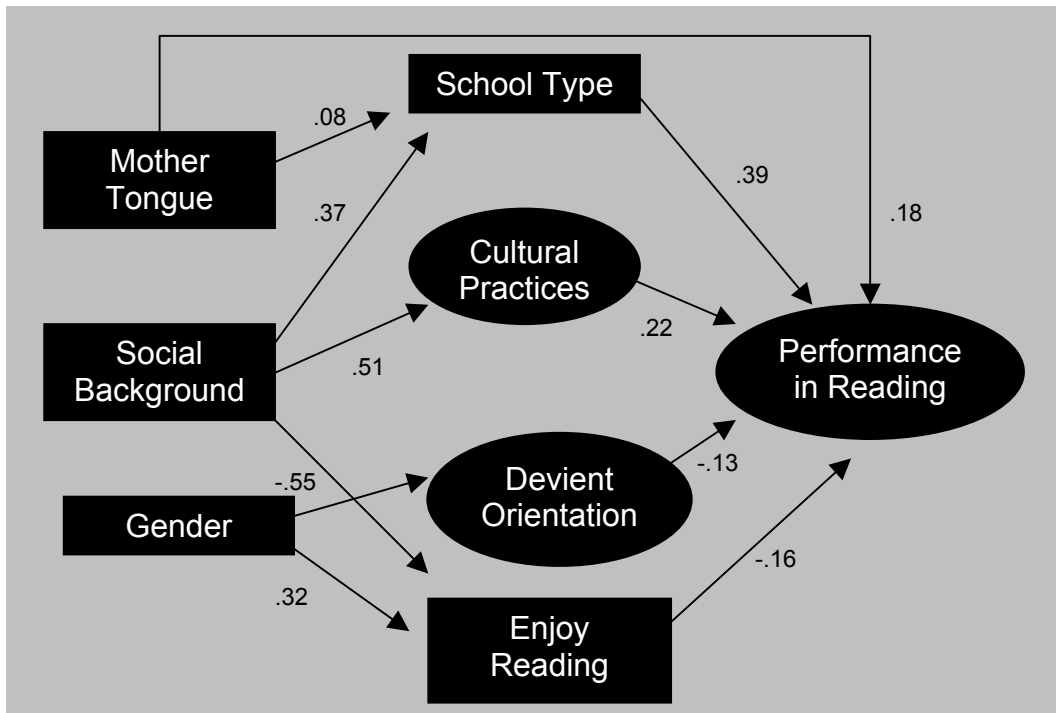
34.　　　　The graph shows the influence of three exogenous factors on reading competency: mother tongue, social background, gender. Of these three factors, only the mother tongue is directly and strongly (.18) linked to the acquisition of reading competency.

▪ **Performance in mathematics is determined by language competence**

35.   The German PISA consortium published the same path analysis to explain performances in mathematics (PISA 2000: 503)
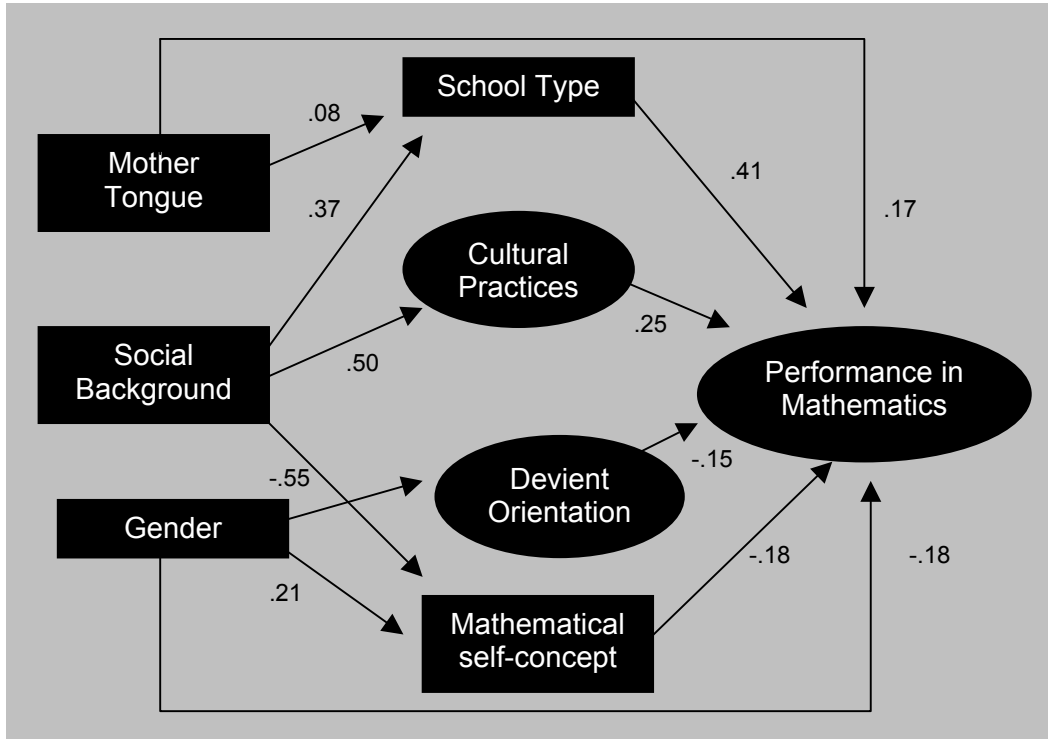
36.   The lines indicating the influence of the three exogenous variables on the learning outcomes in mathematics are quite similar to those indicating the learning outcomes for reading.

37.   Again, mother tongue is a direct and particularly strong path (.17) leading to competency in mathematics. The mastery of the medium of instruction and by consequence the reading competency is the strongest determent for the educational achievements in mathematics. Needless to say, the same path can be traced from the mother tongue to performance in science.

38.   The German PISA report indicates the correlation between the competency in reading, mathematics and science as follows (PISA: 222):

> Science and mathematics   .83
>
> Science and reading   .87
>
> Mathematics and reading   .84

- **Non-native speakers of the medium of instruction have a serious and long lasting educational handicap**

39. The chapter of OECD's German PISA report dedicated to students originating from migrant families is of particular interest for professionals working in the field of UPE in multilingual societies. These students scored far below the average of their German speaking counterparts in all subjects. The analysts are adamant in the explanation of the phenomenon:

> *The major reason for the educational disadvantage of students from migrant families is neither the social situation nor the cultural distance of the family. The decisive factor is the mastery of the German language…Nearly 50% of the students with migrant background do not go beyond the elementary level of reading competency despite the fact that 70% of them have completed the German basic education system. The results of the analysis indicate that the linguistic deficit impacts on all other subjects. People with an insufficient level of reading competency are handicapped in the acquisition of competency in all academic fields* (Pisa: 379).

40. This statement automatically provokes the comparison with the situation of African students. There is no reason to assume that the predominant influence of the mother tongue on all learning achievements loses its validity in an African educational setting, as different as it may be from the European situation. This begs for the following conclusion. Concerning literacy for all, numeracy for all and all other competencies for all the implications for the African learners are clear.

41. As long as the medium of instruction is a foreign language, African students will be a language minority in their own African schools. Their educational achievements will be comparable to those of migrant children in European schools. Theoretically, they all form what the PISA report calls the "group of high risk." This group is composed of all those children whose competency in reading and by consequence in mathematics is so low that their chances on the job market are severely compromised.

42. A look at the results of the Criterion Reference Test administered to Ghanaian primary school-leavers in 2000 indicates that this is not only theory: Out of 100 children about 10 reached mastery level in English (fixed at 60% correct) and about 4 children reached mastery level in maths (fixed at 55% correct).

4. LESSONS LEARNT

43.   In the 25 years of German support for UPE in multilingual societies there is hardly any aspect which has not been dealt with. In some countries, GTZ supported pilot projects in order to enable the respective government to define a sound language policy. In other countries, GTZ assisted the nationwide implementation of an already existing national language policy. Some partners called upon GTZ to support only the introduction or enhancement of teaching in the mother tongue whereas others asked for the support of bilingual education from the beginning.

44.   Considering the range and diversity of the projects supported by GTZ there is hardly any core curriculum component that has not been included in the various implementation activities before and after the existence of the legal framework necessary to bring about UPE in multilingual societies – starting with the design of bilingual education systems at the primary level to the development of the respective curricula and syllabi, and teaching and learning material, to pre-service and in-service training, to the design and production of textbooks and readers in numerous languages, to training subject specialists as well as administrators. These activities are evaluated. The results of these evaluations clearly show the same pattern. This paper tries to summarize past and present experiences in six "lessons".

4.1.   First lesson

> *The use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction or a language familiar to the child leads to a higher competency in reading, mathematics, science and the foreign language*

45.   Needless to say, all impact evaluations of the different GTZ support projects confirm the Nigerian findings of 1978 and those of other comparable evaluations (N.Dutcher, R. Tucker, 1995). Teaching in the learners' mother tongue or in a language familiar to them speeds up the learning of reading and writing, leads to genuine literacy and from there to literacy in mathematics and science as understood in the OECD studies. The development of the mother tongue is a clear precondition for the acquisition of core competencies in a foreign language.

46.   The importance of the mother tongue or a language familiar to the child for the teaching and learning of literacy, numeracy and all other subjects – be it in monolingual or multilingual societies – has become obvious in the last 30 years to require any more elaboration.

47.   Nevertheless it might be helpful to report as one example the educational achievements obtained through the use of the mother tongue in experimental schools compared to the use of French in traditional schools in Niger (Bergmann et al., 1999).

Table 2   **Comparison of educational achievements in Niger, use of mother tongue/use of French**

Version of the text	Subjects	Level	Experimental school	Traditional schools
In French	Language (Total)	CE2	6.8	5.6
		CM1	10.1	9.5
		CM2	12.8	14.0
In National language	Language (Total)	CE2	14.2	5.2
		CM1	13.3	7.0
		CM2	14.7	9.9
In French	St Lecture	CE2	4.8	2.7
		CM1	5.7	4.5
		CM2	6.4	6.0
In National language	ST Lecture	CE2	5.9	2.6
		CM1	6.2	3.3
		CM2	6.3	4.0
In French	Mathematic	CE2	5.7	5.8
In National language		CE2	7.8	7.0
In French		CM1	6.8	8.5
In National language		CM1	9.8	9.2
In French		CM2	2.9	2.9
In National language		CM2	4.3	3.5

ST: sous-total

4.2.   Second lesson

The introduction or the enhancement of teaching and learning in the various languages of multilingual societies encounters important challenges but is not a technical problem

48.   The major outcome of the above mentioned project evaluations is a demonstration of the technical feasibility of native language instruction in multilingual societies. In 25 years of support, all of GTZ's contributions have met challenges, and most of the time the same ones. However, no GTZ project has failed because of insurmountable technical problems with regard to teaching in the mother tongue or in languages familiar to the child.

49.   *Textbooks*. The challenge of designing textbooks for up to 5 subjects of primary school in up to 5 languages for up to 6 grades has been successfully met in Peru, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Ghana, Uganda, Chad, and Namibia. The respective GTZ catalogue mentions more examples of textbook design and production throughout multilingual societies.

50.   Designing textbooks in African languages often implies previous work on technical terms, standardization of the language concerned, adaptation of the methodology for the teaching and learning of reading and writing to the nature of each language (Châtry-Komarek, others). These challenges exist since the start of missionary work and formal education in colonial Africa. They were successfully met 150 years ago for languages in Madagascar, Ghana, Tanzania and many others according to contemporary knowledge. The description and standardization of African languages has never stopped. Today dozens of linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics as much as other institutions continue the ground work and publish grammars, dictionaries, textbooks and literature for sometimes very small language groups. As far as terms in modern technology are concerned GTZ has supported Dar es Salaam´s University Institute of Production Innovation to further develop the respective aspect of Swahili (*Primary Technical Dictionary. English-Swahili*, 1987).

51.   *Teacher training*. Apart from the different academic level the training of teachers speaking an African language does not differ essentially from the training of teachers speaking a European language. The content and the methodology to train teachers in the professional teaching of literacy and numeracy at the various levels are more or less identical. The only real challenge to be seen is organisational and financial.

4.3.   Third lesson

> *The most strategic curriculum component is the existence of textbooks and teachers' guides in the various local languages within the classroom. In addition this component can have a direct impact on poverty alleviation*

52.   An interesting aspect of the pattern is the utmost importance of the development of adapted teaching and learning methodologies and their subsequent transformation into textbooks and teachers' guides accompanied by readers at least in the most widely spoken languages of the same society.

53.   Here are the reasons:

- In many multilingual societies teaching in the mother tongue is an innovation for parents and decision makers. Whatever the type of innovation, it usually provokes suspicion and unease. It seems that the break through to UPE is difficult if not impossible to obtain with "abstract" components of UPE such as mere training activities. The break through to UPE in multilingual societies in the minds of parents, educational authorities and, last but not least, donors is clearly the physical presence of adapted textbooks and teachers' guides in basic schools.

- It is only at this stage of implementation that the different target groups start to believe in feasibility of UPE in multilingual societies, and that indispensable funding agencies start to become interested. The development of textbooks and teachers' guides in local languages and the successful evaluation of their efficiency have induced KfW, the World Bank and the African Development Fund to finance more than 4 Mio copies for Basic Schools in Madagascar over the last ten years following the end of the German support and 1 Mio copies in Ghana.

- The existence of textbooks and teachers' guides in local languages is not only of psychological importance. The implementation of this curriculum component provides schools with urgently needed teaching and learning material. Without this material the effective teaching and learning of literacy at least as a core competency would lack an essential precondition.

- Textbooks and teachers' guides are documented teaching and learning methodologies. If they are professionally designed they transform good syllabi into pedagogical action within the classroom, precede necessary reforms of the curriculum or replace missing curricula.

- Textbooks and teachers' guides in developing countries are the ideal course materials for the pre- and in-service training of teaching staff with the automatic side effect of cost-efficiency.

54.   Last but not least, there are two important economic aspects of the design, production and distribution of textbooks and teachers' guides in languages of Sub-Saharan countries.

55.   GTZ projects with a strong material production component have shown the low costs of that component in developing countries and the relatively short time needed to cover the first years of schooling in various languages. Although methodology/textbook design/production is only one result out of five to be achieved within five years, GTZ support to UPE in Ghana managed to come out with textbooks and teachers' guides covering teaching and learning literacy in Reading and Writing, Mathematics and Science for the first three years of primary in the languages Twi, Ewe, Dagbani, Gonja and Ga – totalling some 90 titles.

- The development of a textbook in an African country is significantly cheaper than the same process in Europe or America. Ignoring the salaries for the foreign experts which are part of GTZ support, the development phase for Mina *Miasro Nuxexle Kple Nungonglo 2*, the textbook for the teaching of literacy in Ewe, Grade 2, needed an investment of about 2350 $US comprising the honoraria for the national writing panel, the 2 illustrators, proof readers and lay out. Without any doubt the costs for these specialists in Europe or America would be incomparably higher. Together with the subsequent printing of 10 000 copies the overall unit cost was about 0.70 $US.

  It could be argued and it has been argued that the reprint of an existing textbook in French or English would be much cheaper. But to our knowledge it has never been calculated how much this textbook would cost in Africa when taking into account the loss of academic achievement and the consequences for the employability of the users concerned.

- The second, mostly ignored aspect of the design, production and distribution of textbooks and teachers' guides, not to mention readers in local languages is the effect on the national book industry. The production of textbooks in local languages for very important language groups/markets (e.g. Hausa or Akan) is potentially lucrative, can boost the national textbook industry and create a considerable number of jobs in developing countries. Namibia with its roughly 2 Mio inhabitants composed of different speech communities has a sound language policy as well as a consequent textbook policy. In 2001 the catalogue of only one private publisher lists 860 available titles. Of these, 596 are in Namibian languages other than English which is the official language. The same publishing house offers altogether 72 full-time jobs, signs 80 contracts per year for the development of new titles and offers another 250 contracts to translators, lecturers, designers and illustrators. The share of non-English titles in the overall turnover is up to 40% annually. The expectations of profit were high enough to attract a foreign investor.

4.4.   Fourth lesson

> *The neglect of the systematic teaching of the official language is an impediment to the promotion of UPE in multilingual societies*

56.   The German support to UPE in multilingual societies started in the genuinely bilingual situation of the Andean countries. Consequently, all support to UPE in Latin America was conceived as contributions to bilingual education. This bilingual approach was realised in Latin America without any restriction and without any alternative. The only debate was about the model of bilingual education to be chosen – transition (teaching in the mother tongue but gradually fading out in favour of the official language) or maintenance (teaching in the mother tongue maintained throughout primary and introduction of the official language as a second medium of instruction).

57.   However, the preceding statements concerning GTZ support to UPE in African multilingual societies clearly show GTZ's emphasis on the introduction or the enhancement of teaching and learning in the mother tongue. There are several reasons for this other than the evident pedagogical ones.

58.   Apart from one or two exceptions, societies in Sub-Saharan Africa are not bilingual like the Andean societies (or some European countries). With the exception of South Africa, a dichotomy between a high percentage of the population having French, English or Portuguese as mother tongue and the rest of the society does not exist in Sub-Saharan African countries. In general, the non African languages are confined to official use, mostly written, and to a small social group in towns.

59.   Not that GTZ projects ignored the importance of the official languages within the respective national curricula. Most of the respective GTZ project planning documents mention the official languages as part of the support. However, this part has never been tackled seriously.

60.   The first reason was to take the quality of the teaching of the official languages for granted given the long-standing experience of the local teachers with the official languages as medium of instruction.

61.   Another reason is the *alleged* doubts of decision makers about non-native speakers developing methodologies for the teaching and learning of French, English or Portuguese as a second language.

62.   The major reason for this inhibition lies in the discrete but nevertheless perceptible presence of the former colonial powers and their cultural and educational prerogatives.

63.   Whatever the reasons for the neglect of the official languages by most GTZ projects in their support for UPE in multilingual societies, the concentration on teaching in the mother tongue or in a language familiar to the child was not always understood, provoked suspicion and sometimes lowered the degree of sustainability.

64.   GTZ support to UPE in African multilingual societies clearly should change its focus by considering the still essential introduction or enhancement of mother tongue as the medium of instruction as part of bilingual education models and their implementation adapted to the needs and the degree of political and social acceptance of the interested countries. GTZ's long-standing experiences in Latin America and the intensive discussions on bilingual education models in Europe (Skutnab-Kangas, 2000) and North America serve as references.

4.5.   Fifth lesson

> *The idea of using local languages as the medium of instruction is still controversial at the policy level in some African countries*

65.   The condition sine qua non for GTZ support to UPE in multilingual societies is either the existence of an adequate language policy or the mandate to support its formulation. The ongoing GTZ supports to Mali and Niger are perfect illustrations of the two types of legal framework.

66.   It was and it still is exactly at that policy level where on several occasions the GTZ support of UPE in multilingual societies encountered its only vital threat. The manifestations of this phenomenon are manifold – from a refusal to extend successful pilot projects to the national level, to a reduction in the number of school years or the number of subjects to be taught in the mother tongue; holding the language policy in a permanent climate of insecurity and sometimes ending with the total reversal of the language policy. One African country has recently officially changed the medium of instruction for the fifth time since independence switching again from teaching in the mother tongue in the first three years of primary school to English only. The waste of funds and in particular the waste of time for the implementation of UPE in these countries is considerable.

67.   The reasons for the criticism of the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction are more or less the same world-wide and – they are shared by stakeholders of UPE both in the developing countries and by their developing partners alike.

▪ **Misconceptions on teaching of a language**

68.   "There are now hundreds of research studies on acquisition of first and second languages. However, despite the research, many myths and misconceptions persist about children and language learning" (Dutcher & Tucker, 1995: 2).

69.   After the review of international experiences with the use of first and second languages in education, Dutcher and Tucker were able to publish the following list of myths. Being tenacious of life and given the obvious scientific fallacy of these reasons, Dutcher and Tucker rightly call them "myths" and refute them one after the other. We select the ones relevant within the context of this paragraph.

Myth 1:   Children have learned their first language by the age of six when they go to school.

> *"Current research indicates that at least 12 years are necessary to learn one's first language".*

Myth 2:   Children learn second languages more quickly and easily than adults.

> *"... when controlled research is conducted, in both formal and informal learning situations, results typically indicate that adult (and adolescent) learners perform better than young children ... In fact, they have an advantage over the young child because they bring to the task all of their knowledge and life experience – the full range of their cognitive development. The exception is in pronunciation where in most cases children do have the advantage."*

Myth 3: **The younger the child, the more skilled in acquiring a second language**

"Many people believe that younger is better when learning a second language. Recent research cites evidence to the contrary. ... A study of English-speaking children in Canada in late-immersion programs (in which the second language is introduced in grades seven or eight) have been found to perform just as well or better on tests of French language proficiency as children who began their immersion experience in kindergarten or grade one.

Only in the case of pronunciation does the younger-is-better theory stand up to practice."

Myth 4: **The more time students spend in a second language context, the quicker they learn the language.**

"This is the more the better myth: that the more exposure to the second language the quicker the learning in the second language. ... For the development of the second language, the amount of time in the first language is much more important than the amount of time in the second. In other words, development of the first language is more important than the time on task in the learning of the second language. This argument is counter-intuitive, but is born out in many studies ..."

Myth 5: **Children have learned a second language once they have learned it**

"Researchers now consider that learning a second language requires two different kinds of skills: (1) social communication; and (2) academic language skills. To learn the first, requires only one or two years; to master the second, at the level approaching grade norms, requires from five to seven years (Cummins 1984)."

For 25 years, GTZ support of UPE in multilingual societies has come across the same myths – and more. Dutcher's list is too tempting not to extend it.

Myth 6: **Scientific and mathematical contents can only be transported by the official language**

There is no reason why African languages should be inapt for mathematics and science. Teaching both subjects in African languages with textbooks in the respective languages began with the first missionaries in the middle of the 19th century. It continues today in various African countries and no evidence can be found proving that weak performance in mathematic is due to an African language.

Myth 7: **Without the official language no broad communication would be possible in the capital and in towns.**

This argument deliberately ignores the fact that the immigrant groups in African towns generally organise communication according to the language of the prevailing linguistic majority or to the economic power of a linguistic group. The children of the minority groups are generally bi-or even

trilingual. The official language is often not part of this natural multilingualism.

Myth 8:   Children of civil servants are excluded from education when one parent is transferred to posts outside their language area.

This argument is very popular amongst civil servants. The consequence of this argument would be to neglect Universal Primary Education in multilingual societies for the sake of a privileged socio-professional minority.

Myth 9:   Globalisation forces everybody to master English

Trade across linguistic borders, commerce, science, tourism of some sort has always existed. This interaction has dramatically increased in the last twenty years and, consequently so has the necessity for a growing number of people to add competency in English to their professional profile. The difference with the preceding centuries lies in the size of the minority concerned. The minority has dramatically increased but it is still a minority. For Germany, traditionally and heavily relying on international trade and commerce, the part of the population having satisfactory knowledge of English is estimated at one third; the rest knows some English or none at all.

Myth 10:   The parents want their children to be taught in the official language

In general parents are confronted with the question if they would rather opt for the official language or the respective African mother tongue in the education of their children. Given the prestige of the official language and the supposed equation with employment the question induces the answer. If asked what they would prefer their children to learn at school they answer by giving a list. The official language would still be on top but this has little to do with a deliberate statement against the mother tongue as medium of instruction based on at least some sort of technical information (E.Goody quoted in Châtry-Komarek, 2003).

Myth 11:   Teaching in the mother tongue was the reason for the educational failure of the past

On the condition that not all international research findings on educational achievements, even the most cautious ones, are completely wrong, these failures cannot be attributed to the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction but rather to the failure to implement a sound language policy or to an undecided language policy.

The respective decree in Madagascar introduced Malagasy as medium of instruction in 1975 but allowed teaching in French as long as the development of a "Malagasy commun" had not come to an end.

It is noticeable that the arguments against teaching in the mother tongue are never linked to its objective – the effective teaching of literacy and numeracy to all – but nearly exclusively connected to the importance and the learning of the official language.

It is further noticeable that outside academia often, the public discussion on UPE in multilingual societies is often dominated by all sorts of objections. The all-important advantages of teaching in the mother tongue and its technical feasibility are usually marginalised if not silenced.

▪ **Language policy is policy**

70. It would be dishonest to silence the evident political aspect of language policy. Language policy is a pawn in the struggle for power or the preservation of power and this is by no means a typically African phenomenon (Cummins, 2000). Jean Calvet can easily generalise by writing: *The war of languages is always part of a wider war* (Calvet, 1999). The history of language policies does not show many examples of policy decisions being conditioned and influenced by the results of experiments as they might have been reported in case studies or by the recommendations of experts (Mateene, 1996). Rogers and Shoemaker perhaps come closest to the political character of changes in the language policies by describing the reaction of the political elite to innovations in general: *The elite are enclined to screen out innovation whose consequences threaten to disturb the* status quo*, for such disruption may lead to a loss of position for the elite. The "dangerous" innovations are often those of a restructuring nature, rather than new ideas which will affect only the functioning of the system* (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1976).

4.6.   Sixth lesson

> *The attitude of some bilateral and international donors towards the conditions for UPE in multilingual societies is ambivalent. This impedes, slows down or even reverses the move towards UPE.*

71. In her report to the Ford Foundation, Susan Malone (2001: 44) states:

> *"Most international organisations (…), do not have a policy of promoting mother tongue education. In policy statements, these organisations stress the importance of improving access, equity, efficiency and quality, but they seldom highlight the important roles that languages issues play in those four areas …*
>
> *Written policy statements on language are difficult to find. We searched the recent education sector strategy of the World Bank and found only five short references to language among its 80 pages* (World Bank, 1999)*."*

72. According to the same author, a senior adviser for UNICEF New York admitted that even UNICEF does not have a policy explicitly stated with regard to language of instruction.

73. As a service provider for the implementation of UPE in multilingual societies, GTZ can only agree with the central issue of Malone's report:

> *"The paradox revealed in the knowledge that children learn best in a language that they know and the reluctance of the international community and many countries to acknowledge this fact and follow up with policy and action…"* (Malone, 2000:47).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

74.   Literacy and numeracy for all is not a privilege of monolingual societies. Since 1978 literacy for all has proven feasible in multilingual societies of Sub-Saharan Africa as well. The blind alleys and the avenues are known and bilingual education seems to be the main avenue. As some African countries have shown in the past and some others show at present, the information, the technical know how and the necessary funds are available.

75.   What is not needed are further pilot projects to prove the evidence. What is needed is the firm will of the governments to provide Primary Education not only to the same "happy few" but to all those with African language as mother tongue.

76.   It finally needs a firm, clear and outspoken stand from the international donor community concerning the evident pre conditions for UPE in multilingual societies.

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