Language Planning and development of the new Ethiopian language policy

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Introduction

- Language is considered a mark of cultural and ethnic identity. Therefore, language, culture and identity are such interconnected entities that they cannot be isolated from each other.
- The choice and use of the right language makes a difference in achieving a high degree of quality in education.
- A failure to integrate social, linguistic and cultural contexts within the education system would make the system irrelevant and unsuccessful.
- With the demise of the Derg in 1991, Ethiopia has already made a radical shift from a monolingual to a multilingual education system.
Language situation in Ethiopia

- About 86 languages are spoken in Ethiopia.
- Of these, nearly 46 languages are used for the schooling process as a Medium of Instruction (MoI) or as subject in primary level schools.
- There are also some languages that are developed and used in education up to the university level.
- Amharic is the federal working language of the country.
- The constitution gives equal opportunity and status for all languages of the country, so every region has its own local working language.
The language development situation now

- Currently many local languages of Ethiopia have developed orthographies and schooling begins in the respective mother tongue:
  - Families of Ethiopian Languages
    - Semitic languages: 7
    - Cushitic languages: 12
    - Omotic languages: 15
    - Nilo-Saharan languages: 12
- About 46 languages are using the fertile ground of the constitution.
The current language development situation (Continued)

• Radio broadcasts
  – Community radio about: 55
  – FM radio: 25
  – National and foreign radio: 5

• TV broadcasts
  – Entertainment: 5
  – News: 8
  – Relegates: 9
The language policies of Ethiopia during different regimes

• **Haile Silassie I**: Amharic was a national language, and it was stated in the constitution.

• **The military government** had tried to address the issue of linguistic equity and rights in a constitution more overtly than its predecessor. Nevertheless, this was highly criticized as mere paper-based and impractical.

• **The 1991 constitution states**: "The people’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ensures the equality, respect and development of the nationality languages.” Practically, there was no other Ethiopian language given any official status nor there was any implication in the constitution, that other Ethiopian languages could be used for official purposes.
Draft Language Policy of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Section one focus on five topic

• Preamble
• Policy Vision
• Policy Rationales
• Fundamental Principles of the policy
• Objectives of the Policy
Section Two

Section two focus on eleven Policy Focal Points and Strategies as follows:

• Language Rights
• Working Language
• Language of Mass Media and Entertainment Industry
• Language and Education
• Writing System
Continued ...

• Language Use on Public Signs
• Nomenclature
• Differentiating and Harmonizing Language and Dialect
• Professional Qualification, Recognition and Standards for Translation and Interpretation
• Documentation of Languages, Indigenous Knowledge and Folklore
• Classical Written Languages
Section Three

Section three focused on Policy Implementation Modalities

- Language Planning and Development
- Policy Implementers and Their Responsibilities
- Structure of Implementers of the Policy
- Awareness Creation
- Preparation of Policy Implementation Schedule
Continued ...

- Legal Frameworks for Policy Implementation
- Monitoring and Reviews
- Human Resource and Training
- Source of Finance
- The Contribution of Other Stakeholders
Summary and Conclusion

• The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which presents in more elaborate detail the rights expressed in general terms in the Charter, gave equal recognition to all Ethiopian languages through Article 5. By recognizing language rights, this provision laid down the constitutional guarantee for a sustainable response to issues of language equality.
Articles 20 and 39 of the Constitution provide for the rights of every nation, nationality and people of Ethiopia to use its language in speech and writing; to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history. The Constitution guarantees that no Ethiopian national shall be subjected to any discrimination on grounds of language, identity, belief, outlook or other stance. It provides that Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government, whereas members of the Federation may by law determine their respective working languages.
The approach used in selecting working languages, and employing them as the MoI for education and the dissemination of science and technology, has not been conducted in an institutionalized and planned manner that treats language development like any other development sector. The practice on the ground reflects problems of organization, supply, and coordination. Accordingly, cognizant of the need to address the challenges arising from language use, refine the system of language use and reorient the current practice in the right direction, this language policy has been formulated pursuant to the provisions of Art. 51(2) and Art. 77(6) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.
Thank you!