

Language and inequality - could Africa learn from Asia?

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Talking points

From Education for All to Learning for All

- **Literate – in whose language?**
- **A closer analysis of the document “Learning for All”**
- **English as the Language of Science and Technology**
- **Science Education and English Medium: The Sri Lankan Experience**
- **The case of Malaysia**
- **But in Africa the colonial languages linger on**
- **Being tested in a language one does not understand**
- **Changing a belief system which has become *common knowledge***
- **The Hope for Africa**

It is shocking that the international dialogue on Education for All has not confronted the problems children face when they enter school not understanding the medium of instruction, when they are expected to **learn** a new language at the same time as they are learning **in** and **through** the new language. **The basic problem is that children cannot understand what the teacher is saying!** We believe that if international planners had faced these issues on a global scale, there would have been progress to report. However, instead of making changes that would lead to real advancement, the international community has simply repledged itself to the same goals, merely moving the target ahead from the year 2000 to 2015. (Dutcher 2004:8)

From Learning for All – World Bank Education strategy 2020



What matters for growth is not the years that students spend in school but what they learn
(World Bank 2011:2)

The seriousness of the learning challenge

More than 30 percent of Malian youths aged 15–19 years who completed six years of schooling could not read a simple sentence; the same was true of more than 50 percent of Kenyan youths (World Bank 2011: 6-7).



Literate in whose language?

Only about 25% of the country's population were (in 1961) literate in English, which is the official language. However, most people are literate in Krio, which is the lingua franca of the country..... in absolute numbers there has been a tremendous expansion in the number of illiterates. As the population has increased, the number of literate people has not kept pace; 85 out of every 100 Sierra Leones are now illiterate. (Banya, 1993: 163)



A closer analysis of the document “Learning for All”



It should be noted that French is not a mother tongue in Mali and that grade 2 is a very early grade in which to test a student in a language that is not his or her mother tongue. (World Bank 2011: 70)

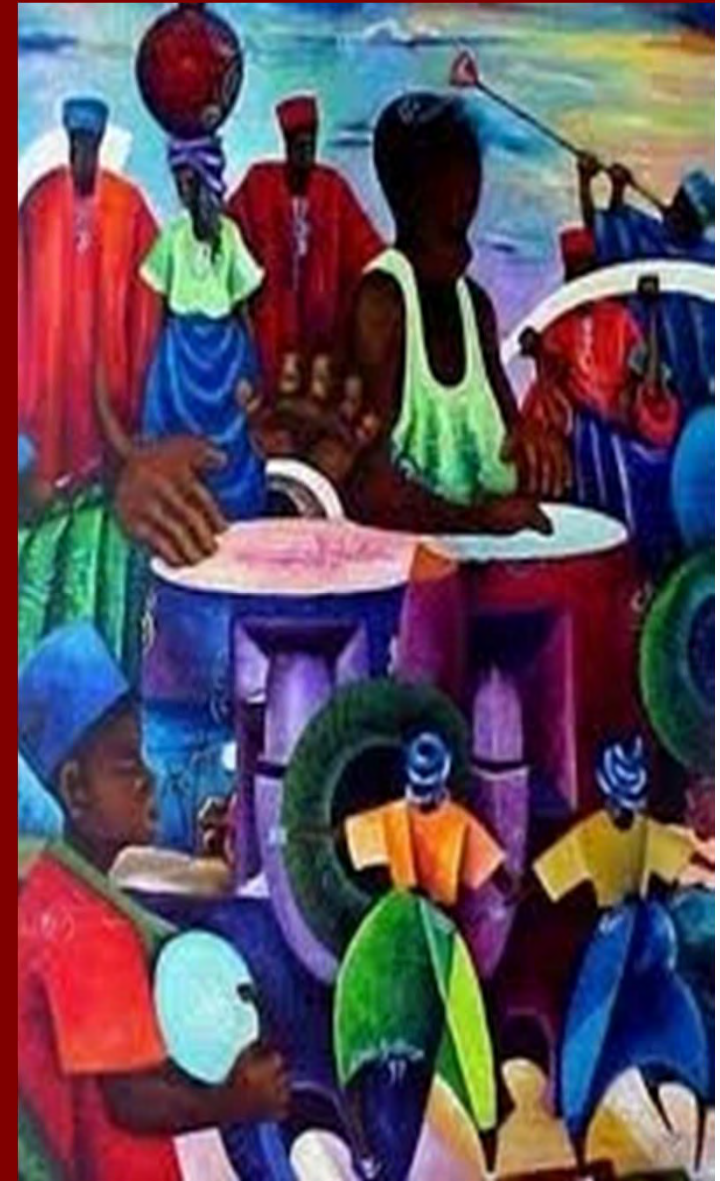
Who benefits from having their mother tongue as the language of instruction?



Children in these age groups (between the ages of 6 and 8) benefit from the instructional use of their mother tongue, combined with instruction in the dominant language (World Bank 2011:15).

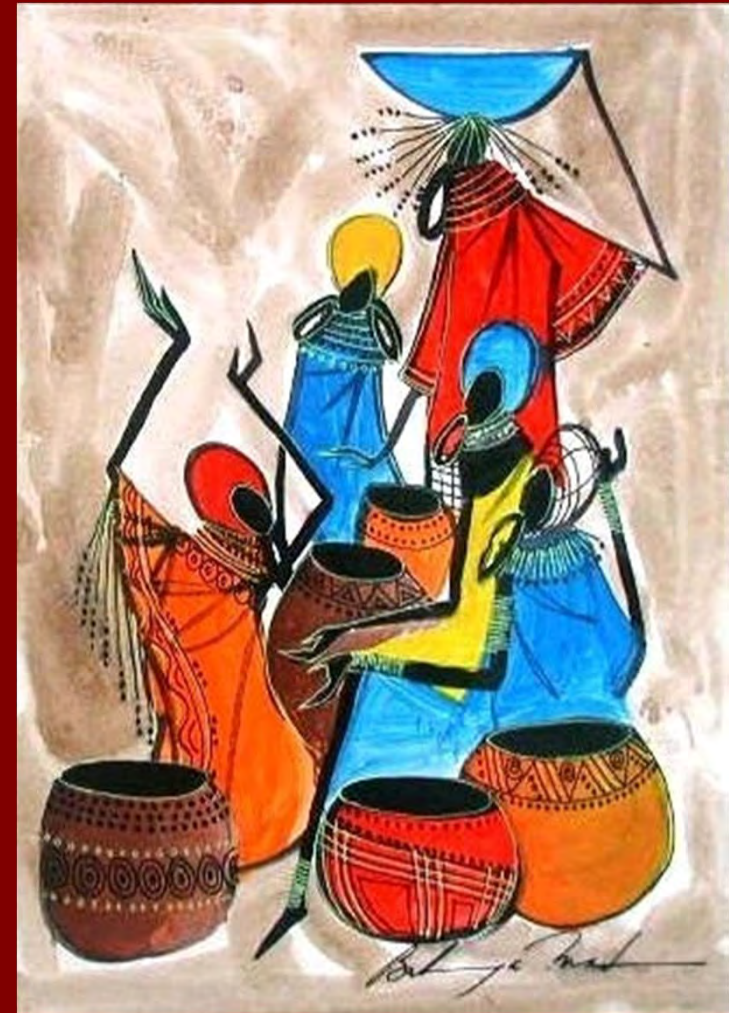
A lack of political will

Outside Africa no one questions why the languages of countries with smaller populations in Europe should be used as medium, even up to and including the university level. What seems to be lacking in many African countries is the political will to break away from the colonial policy and practice of limiting mother-tongue education to lower primary classes. Where such a will exists much can be done in a short period of time (Bamgbose 2005:255).



English as the Language of Science and Technology

- A story from a class-room in Tanzania
- It should be demonstrated that countries such as Finland, Norway, China or Japan, which do not teach their children through the medium of an “international language” are isolated and have lost track of technological developments beyond their borders (Rugemalira & al. 1990: 31).



The situation in Sri Lanka

The transition from English to the national languages as the medium of instruction in science helped to destroy the great barrier that existed between the privileged English educated classes; between the science educated elite and the non-science educated masses. It gave confidence to the common man that science is within his reach and to the teachers and pupils that a knowledge of English need not necessarily be a prerequisite for learning science (Ranaweera, 1976: 423).



Two reasons why the need to switch to the national languages was greatest in the science subject

science education was considered the main instrument through which national development goals could be achieved. The English medium was a great constraint which hindered the expansion of science education

a didactic teaching approach had to be replaced by an activity- and inquiry-based approach. Such an approach makes a heavy demand on the language ability of the pupils and is more successful if the medium of instruction is also their first language

The case of Malaysia

The Malaysian government announced on 8.July.2009 that it would abandon the use of English to teach ***mathematics and science***, bowing to protesters who demanded more use of the national Malay language

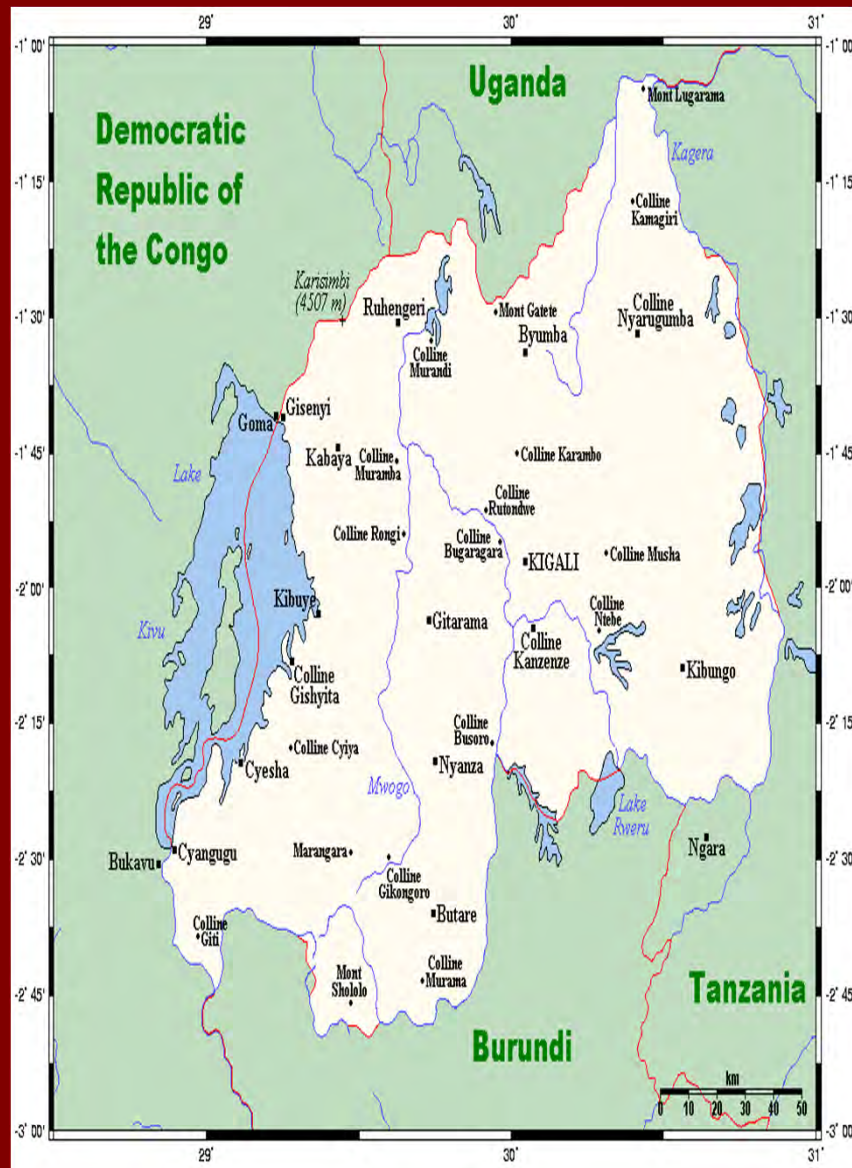
Malay will be reinstated in state-financed schools starting in 2012 because teaching in English caused academic results in those subjects to slip, Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said

Asia vs Africa



Whereas in Asia the broader masses demonstrate and protest in the streets in favour of the use of their local languages as languages of instruction for science and technological education, in Africa the elites lead the way in support of the use of the colonial languages as languages of instruction

The situation in Rwanda



On the 8th of October 2008 the Cabinet in Rwanda requested:

- The Minister of Education to put in place an intensive programme for using English as a language of instruction from grade 1 in all public and Government sponsored primary and secondary schools and higher learning institutions;

The situation in Tanzania



I can recall from my school days about my Chemistry teacher who would ask us: "Any question students?" Nobody answered and he would conclude: "If there are no questions, then you have understood everything!" We did not understand him at all, not only because he taught in English only, he spoke American English!- he was a Peace Corp. The issue was language, as it also is in our contemporary schools. (Mwinsheikhe, 2001)

Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa <http://www.loitasa.org>

The three editors

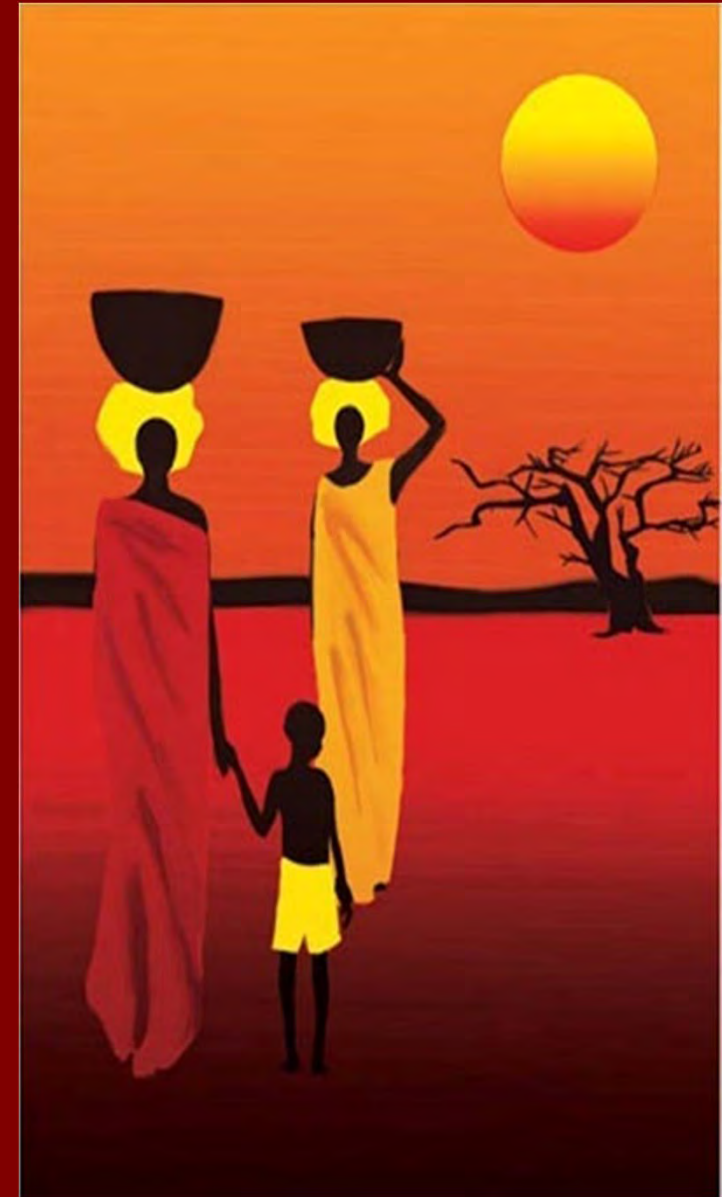


The three coordinators



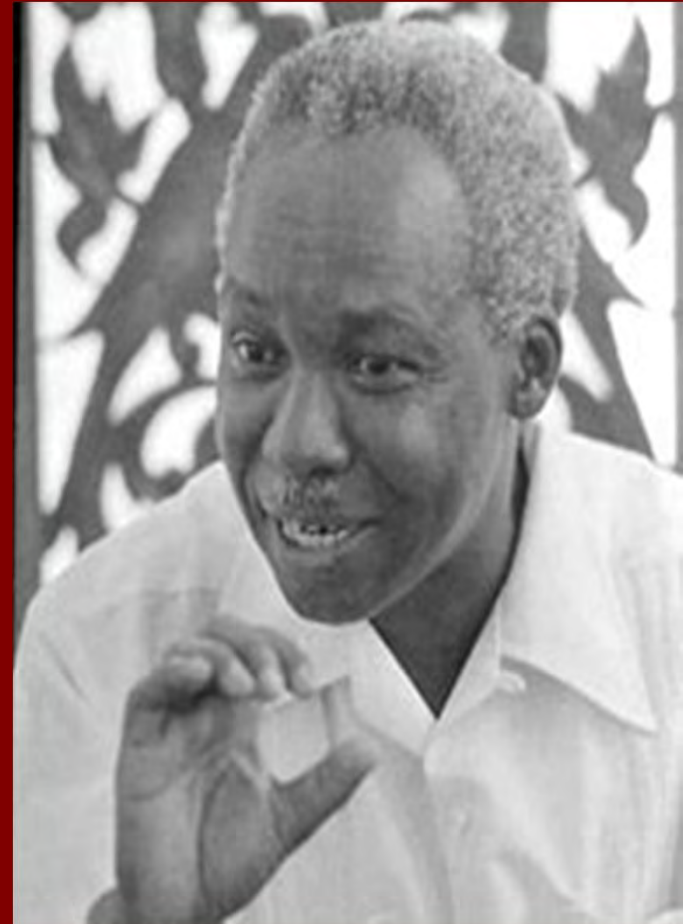
What is Zanzibar up to?

They find that “primary English does not provide an adequate basis for the switch to English in the secondary phase” . They recommend: Gradually introducing English medium teaching, starting first with one subject in, say std 4, increasing to core subjects, i.e. Maths, Science, Social Science by the end of Std.7 (MEVT/University of Bristol 2005:5). The Ministry decided, partly built on this advice, to reintroduce English as the LOI from grade five in mathematics and science subjects in all government primary schools (MEVT 2006).



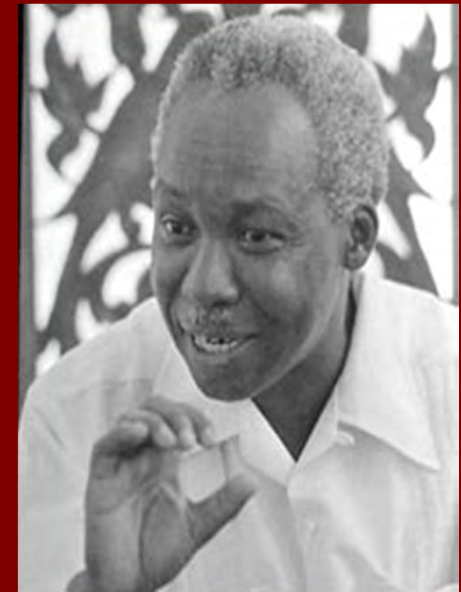
Nyerere on the examinations inherited from colonial times

The examinations our children at present sit are themselves geared to an international standard and practice which has developed regardless of our particular problems and needs.



Nyerere on how examinations should be designed

What we need to do now is to think first about the education we want to provide, and when thinking is completed, think about whether some form of examination is an appropriate way of closing an education phase. Then such an examination should be designed to fit the education which has been provided.(Nyerere, 1968: 63).



Asia vs Africa



Since Ghanaian students took the test in English (the so-called official language of Ghana), those whose first language is non-English are at great disadvantage. We are not surprised that countries that top-performed in the mathematics test--- Taiwan, Malaysia, Latvia, Russia- used their own language to teach and learn mathematics. (Fredua-Kwarteng and Ahia 2005 a)

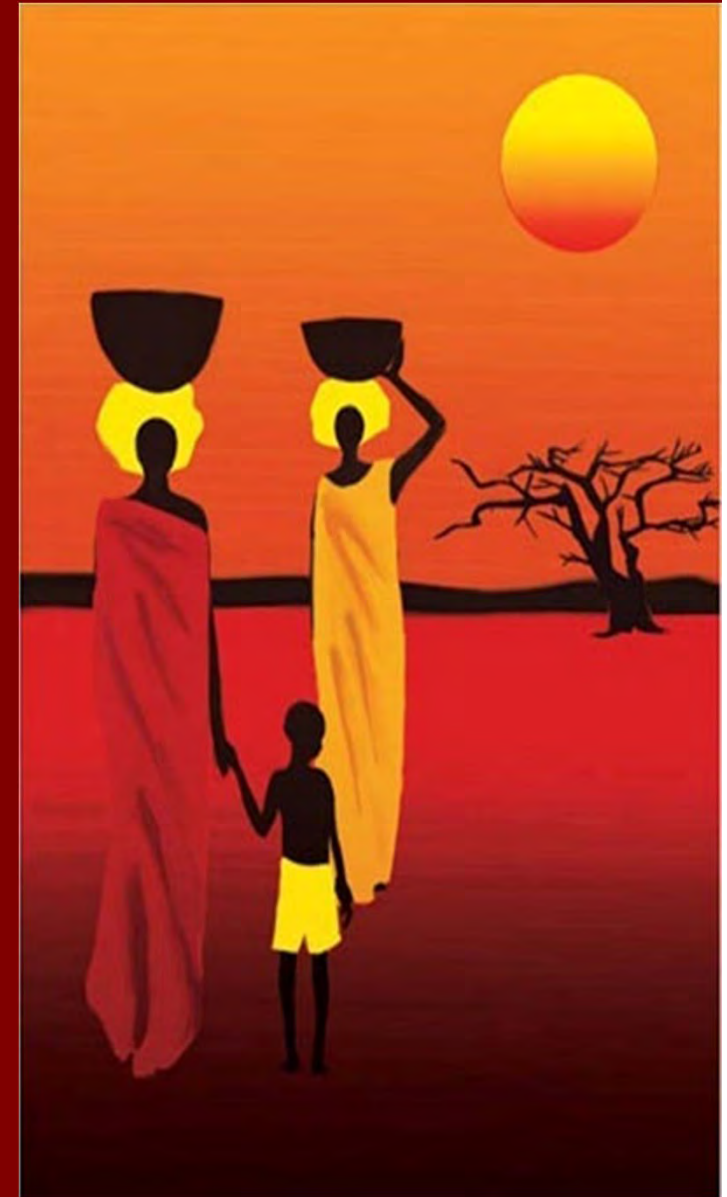
Changing a belief system which has become *common knowledge*

Foucault (1988) claims that belief systems gain momentum (and hence power) as more people come to accept the particular views associated with that belief system as *common knowledge*. Some ideas, being considered undeniable "truths", come to define a particular way of seeing the world

The power groups have an interest in promoting the misconception that having a language teachers and students can barely communicate in will be of benefit for them. These groups are dependent for their positions and political powers upon the obedience, submission, and cooperation of their subjects.

The hope for Africa

- African academics like Bamgbose (2005), Mazrui (1997), Mekonnen (2009), Qorro (2009), Desai (2006), Rubagumya (2003), Prah (2005), Nomlomo (2007), Vuzo (2007), Bgoya (1992), Makelela (2005), Mwinsheikhe (2007) see how the formal school sector is a re-colonisation of education in Africa through the curriculum promoted and the language of instruction used. These academics may to-day seem to be marginal cases but the hope for Africa lies in such people gathering sufficient momentum, and hence power, which will lead to political will, to have their views accepted as *common knowledge*.



Thank you for listening

- **Asanteni sana**
- **Enkosi kakhulu**
- **Arigato gozaimasu**
- **Thank you so much**
- **Merci bien**
- **Vielen Dank**
- **Mange takk**

