

**NORTHERN NETWORK FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

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**10th December 2003**

**STATEMENT ON THE LANGUAGE POLICY**  
**ISSUED BY NORTHERN NETWORK FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**  
**TO THE GOVERNMENT OF GHANA THROUGH THE MINISTER OF**  
**EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS**

**CC: The Minister; Basic, Secondary and Girl Child Education,  
Northern Caucus of Parliament, Regional Ministers in Northern  
Ghana, Regional and District Directors of Education in the Northern,  
Upper East and Upper West Region, Complementary/Alternative  
Education Providers, The Media**

Having followed closely discussions, debates and statements on the new language policy as announced by the government in May 2002, the Northern Network for Education Development (NNED), an initiative of Civil society, with over 100 members made up of NGOs, Private Individuals and Institutions, the Regional Houses of Chiefs and Regional Directorates of GES of the three Northern Regions of Ghana, whose aim is to harmonize the collective efforts, energy and resources of all people with interest in Northern Ghana to address challenges facing education development in Northern Ghana, has resolved to make known and for action her concerns.

**NNED's view on the Language Policy**

1. The issue of the language policy is not whether or not children should learn English as the official language of communication in Ghana. It is about getting a credible medium of instruction in schools and particularly lower primary. It is about how best we learn any subject including English Language. We all agree that our children should learn and be able to read, speak and write English.
2. NNED is concerned about the unseriousness that has prevailed over a policy on language since independence as this negatively impacts on our education system. Official policies, we do recognize are important because these determine the priorities that are made in terms of resources allocation to various sectors including education.

3. To NNED, a language policy for Ghana and the current debate is a matter of *quality and equal access to education*, which is a right. It is about Education For All by 2015.

Certainly no one is against Education For All. The issue is how best, as a country we achieve education for all.

With English as the only medium of instruction, Ghana will never achieve the objective of Education For All as we will be denying majority of children in access to education which, is also a right.

4. NNED's concern, as far as the Language policy is concerned is with rural children, most of who have never had access to English, not even access to any kind of education. In the three northern regions, we are in a situation where averagely 50% of children are out of school. How do we reach them?

For children in the cities and urban centers who are brought up with parents speaking English to them, there might not be any problem despite the sadness it evokes seeing Ghanaians not able to read and write their own language.

### **Concerns by Government and other Stakeholders**

1. NNED is fully aware of the constraints in the implementation of a local language or mother tongue as the medium of instruction, hence the call to use English as the sole medium of instruction especially during the first three years of primary education.
2. Indeed we share with government on concerns regarding the multiplicity of languages in particularly urban areas, incompetent language teachers, and insufficient teaching and learning material, lack of appropriate methodology in schools among others. We are also well aware that the three Northern regions of Ghana have so many local languages.
3. We strongly believe that these concerns can be overcome. What is needed is creativity and consistency, backed by commitment and a political will. These are not achieved by changing the policy.

## Best Practices

1. We wish to draw the attention of all to the fact that the use of only mother tongue as medium of instruction has been tested and proven to be the most effective way of learning including a second language such as English.
2. School for Life (SFL) and Action Aid Ghana, both members of NNED and complementary/alternative education providers have adopted mother tongue as the sole medium of instruction in their programmes and the graduates produced compete effectively with others and are among the best at the higher levels of education.

We therefore call on government, as a matter of urgency, to fulfill its commitment as contained in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) by learning from these practices and adopting such methodologies in our formal education delivery process.

## Flexibility of a medium of instruction

1. NNED has been following with great interest the work of the Educational Committees that were set up, hoping these would come out with recommendations that would bring to rest the heated debate on the language policy.

In particular, NNED has studied the recommendations of the *President Committee on the Review of the Education Reforms in Ghana (PCRER)* and the *Education Sector Review (ESR)*. NNED is also fully aware of the strategies contained in the *Education Strategic Plan*, which is the framework with which Ghana will be delivering education for 2003-2015.

We commend these Committees for the work done. We believe their recommendations point to local language or mother tongue as medium of instruction.

2. We are however discouraged with the issue of flexibility of the policy and the target set for circulating guidelines on the policy to schools. NNED wonders how committed our policy makers and implementers would be to a “*flexible approach and a much more direct prioritization of upgrading Ghanaian language and the quality of teaching mother tongue*” as recommended by PCRER .

Again, we doubt the commitment of all stakeholders to the recommendation that *“either the local language or English language should be used as a medium of instruction at the kindergarten and lower primary as appropriate”*.

In our opinion, a flexible approach means no real prioritization and commitment to the use of local language.

## **Recommendations**

In the view of NNED, education is a right, which must be ensured. If the Ministry of Education’s mission of

*“Providing relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them acquire skills that will assist them develop their potential, to be productive, to facilitate poverty reduction and to promote socio-economic growth and national development”* is to be achieved, we demand, as a matter of urgency the following from the Government:

1. Government, through the Ministry of Education should initiate public debate and discussion on a need for a credible local language policy. The issue of “flexible approach or policy” should be revisited. There should be enough commitment on government’s part to state her position clearly and now. This position should be the use of the local language in all preschools and primary schools and nothing else.
2. Steps should be taken to adopt approaches at reaching and providing education for out of school and hard to reach children especially in the three northern regions of Ghana. In particular, Government should engage in serious consultation with School For Life and Action Aid Ghana aimed at replicating their approach in rural schools in Northern Ghana.
3. Government should provide the required resources for the implementation of a local language policy in Ghana. The Bureau of Ghana Languages, the Department of Ghanaian Languages of University of Education-Winneba should be strengthened to produce adequate local language books and to train more local language teachers respectively. The Ministry of Education should also develop and implement an efficient teacher recruitment strategy.
4. In all matters of education, bridging the gap between the three northern regions and the rest of Ghana should be given priority attention.

**Signed**

**1.....Sign.....  
(Chairperson, NNED Executive Committee)**

**2.....Sign.....  
(Member, NNED Technical Subcommittee)**

**3.....Sign.....  
(Member, NNED Technical Subcommittee)**