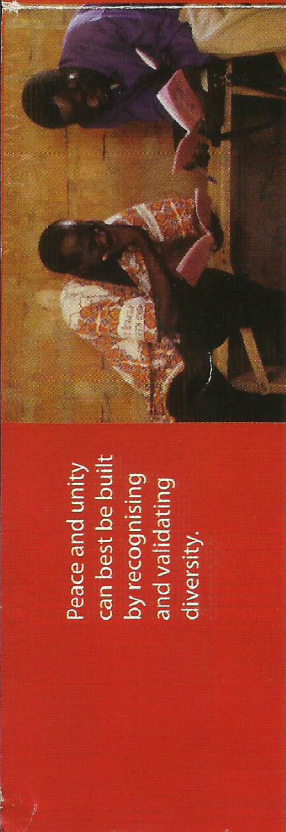


"African States recognize the need to develop African languages in order to ensure their cultural advancement and acceleration of their economic and social development. To this end, they should endeavour to formulate and implement appropriate national language policies."

Article 18, African Union Charter for African Cultural Renaissance



Peace and unity can best be built by recognising and validating diversity.

Using local languages undermines national unity.

No, national unity is undermined when people are denied the right to maintain their language and culture.

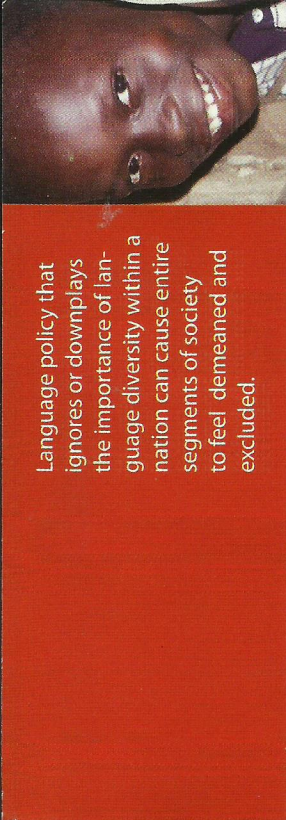
Isn't it obvious?

Many people think that "one nation, one language" is a strategy that will lead to national unity, peace and economic prosperity. It seems obvious, but is it true?

Obvious answers can sometimes be wrong answers. It seems obvious that national unity can be built through linguistic uniformity. But history shows that denying people the right to maintain their language and culture can cause resentment. People have multiple identities and multiple loyalties, such as loyalty to clan, tribe and nation. If the cultural identity of a community is not under threat they will not feel the need to fight to maintain it.

Unity in diversity

Peace and unity can best be built by recognising and validating diversity, whether that diversity is ethnic, religious or linguistic. National languages should be celebrated as an important part of the nation's cultural identity. They should be incorporated into the education systems, governance structures and economic environment of the nation.



Language policy that ignores or downplays the importance of language diversity within a nation can cause entire segments of society to feel demeaned and excluded.

But ethnic groups fight each other. If we get rid of ethnicity we will get rid of ethnic tension.

"Language" and "ethnicity" are used to label competing groups. Don't confuse the label with the cause!

While it is true that ethnic groups within a country may come into conflict with each other, it is usually over access to resources such as land, water, economic opportunities and facilities rather than being specifically about language or culture. However ethnicity and ethnic distinctions are often used by people who want to fuel conflict. Language and culture can become an easy way of identifying competing groups, but they are seldom the cause of the conflict.

Language policy

Language policy that ignores or downplays the importance of language diversity within a nation can cause entire segments of society to feel demeaned and excluded. Every country should have a language policy that builds peace by reflecting and respecting the linguistic diversity of the nation. It should respect the nation's language communities and their right to educational access and political participation. Such a language policy, implemented in the education system as well as in government and social institutions, can empower the whole population to participate in the political, economic and social development of the nation.

SIL International® is a faith-based nonprofit organization committed to serving language communities worldwide as they build capacity for sustainable language development. SIL does this primarily through research, translation, training and materials development. Founded in 1934, SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc) has grown from a small summer linguistics training program with two students to a staff of over 5,500 coming from over 60 countries. SIL's linguistic investigation exceeds 2,590 languages spoken by over 1.7 billion people in nearly 100 countries. The organization makes its services available to all, without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnolinguistic background.

Language Development

SIL works with language communities around the world as they build their capacity for the sustainable development of their own languages. Language development is the series of ongoing planned actions that a language community takes to ensure that its language continues to serve its changing social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual needs and goals. SIL's expertise related to language development includes training and consulting for activities such as linguistic analysis, orthography and writing systems development, literature development and multilingual education and literacy.



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Multilingualism and Peace