

German-African Network discusses language policies

In November, 2009, scholars and administrators from 17 African countries converged at the University of Nairobi, Main Campus for the 4th International ganaa-Workshop on Language policies. The theme for the Workshop was "Indigenous languages vs. International languages as languages of instruction and subjects in African educational systems". The Workshop conference was jointly organized by the German Studies Programme and the Department of Linguistics of the University of Nairobi, with funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

The Workshop was officially opened by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Prof. Jacob T. Kaimenyi, who emphasised the role of the University of Nairobi as a facilitator of international scientific cooperation, he stated that local languages are critical for the development of African countries "there is therefore need for language scholars to contribute to the development of language policies.

During the four-day workshop eminent researchers from the areas of linguistics, literary criticism and cultural studies, presented reports on the status of language in their respective countries

focusing on the various educational systems. The workshop agreed that education can only succeed, if the language of instruction is mastered fully by both the teachers and the students.

The workshop participant's emphasized that education in the vernacular languages of learners is a prerequisite to successful schooling in general. Furthermore, it was agreed that it is necessary for children to be educated in a second languages for at least six years before that language is a viable medium of instruction for them. This is in sharp contrast to the reality in many African countries where the languages of the former colonial powers are commonly held as the ones fit for instructional purposes yet neither teachers nor students have sufficient command of them.

The Workshop reiterated that policy makers should appreciate the need to facilitate education in the many African vernacular language adding that this would require considerable financial and administrative efforts on the part of the governments given that teachers have to be trained and educational materials developed. However, these investments can be exceeded by the direct and indirect costs created by failed educational and, as a consequence, professional careers of up to 70 per cent of the pupils in some African countries.

Those in attendance at the Workshop included Prof. Enos Njeru, Dean, Faculty of Arts, UoN, Jutta Quade, DAAD office, Sub-Saharan Africa and Prof. Ekkehard Wolff, a scholar in African languages and cultures.



Scholars from 16 African countries and Germany during the 4th International ganaa workshop on language policies in Africa.