

Language and poverty in Africa: Do language policies help or hinder poverty reduction?

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In June 1999, the G7 Heads of State and Ministers of Finance met in Cologne to launch a major debt relief initiative leading to the establishment of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in many African countries. PRSPs serve as general policy frameworks for national policymakers and their international partners in more than 30 African countries today. Ten years after the Cologne summit, where do we stand with regard to the integration of language policy into African strategies for poverty reduction and sustainable development? This presentation first takes stock of the role of language and language policies in African PRSPs. It then identifies the main interfaces between language policies and poverty reduction strategies on the African continent and provides a generic description of main stakeholders and institutions that influence and are affected by specific policies and interfaces. Against this background, the potential impacts of language policies on poverty reduction are assessed, based on the notion of short and medium-term transmission channels. Which language policies are most effective in achieving poverty reduction, and which policies are likely to hinder poverty reduction? The conclusions and recommendations relate mainly to the current and potential complementarity between language policies and poverty reduction strategies, but also address the need for further international cooperation and scientific research in this area.