



CEO Roundtable of Tanzania

Ethical Leadership for Growth and Prosperity

PRESS RELEASE

Tanzania's Latest Big Change is a Big Step Backwards

Dar es Salaam. 24th February, 2015: The CEO Roundtable of Tanzania's Chairman weighs in on the new education policy.

I wish to contribute my two cents to the debate that has been triggered by the recent decision of our Government to make far reaching changes in the education policy in our country. This change has led to the replacement of English as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools with our very own Kiswahili.

As someone who was educated in a developed foreign country that uses its own indigenous language as a medium of instruction from Kindergarten to University, you would expect I would be supportive of this big change.

And to be fair, I have always believed that being able to acquire and to impart knowledge in local languages is a mark of progress and cultural maturity, not backwardness or weakness.

After all, most developed nations from North America through Europe, Asia and Latin America to Arabia use their own languages as medium of instruction for all stages of schooling.

So why am I upset by the new change? It is because I don't believe the changes were made in good faith nor was enough preparation done to make sure all systems are in place and ready and we are not going to put current and future generations of Tanzanians at a disadvantage from which they will not be able to recover easily.

Secondly, the arguments made by the proponents of the new policy in justifying this change are devoid of logic and paint a picture of a people who have very little or no understanding of the fact that we live today in a globalized world where Tanzanians do not have the luxury of being able to create their own reality that can be kept safe from the effects of competitive forces that are a dominant feature of today's life.

I also suspect that the change may be nothing more than a knee jerk reaction of policy makers to the steadily falling pass rates at both primary and secondary school levels over the past twenty years and is therefore a wrong solution to the problem.

Just as you cannot cure a gangrene wound by applying aspirin to it, you cannot turn around Tanzania's failing education system by replacing English with Swahili as a medium of instruction, much as I would love to see that in another life where all other problems have been attended to.

I agree with Biyi Bandele, a London based African blogger who had the following to say about Tanzania's new education policy:

"Until every single Mathematical theorem and every single theory in astrophysics and cosmology, and in medicine, and in chemistry, and in every single sphere of knowledge is written or available in translation in Kiswahili and Igbo and every other African language, I personally will always reject and abhor that easy [and easily comforting, xenophobic language] that dresses itself in the ultimately

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empty, and cheap, and hokey, and cheaply sentimental rhetoric of noble nationalism. I've been to Tanzania, and I've been to Zanzibar. And I've been to many countries in east Africa. What Tanzania needs now, what East Africa needs now, and what Africa needs now isn't another instance of brainless, reflexive, macho posturing [which this is]. What we need, what we really need, is to have tens of thousands - millions - of our best minds, schooled, not only in Swahili, Hausa, Xhosa, and Yoruba, and every major African language but also in English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Farsi, Chinese and Japanese, and in every single language on this little planet called earth, where knowledge, not just cheap, populist, propaganda, is disseminated"

There is also the issue of fairness and honesty or lack of it. I am very curious to see if those responsible for this policy change are going to move their children from the private English Medium schools to the Kiswahili-only public schools where the rest of the country's children go. I very much doubt they will.

This policy may sound great and even patriotic but it will spell disaster for the development of the Tanzanian human resource on whose strength the very future of this country depends.

It is not too late to pause and reflect on the implications of what has just been done. Rwanda changed the medium of instruction in schools from French to English which was a good decision because in everything that matters (books, systems, teachers), English is very well resourced even in Rwanda and the change did not cause any major disruptions at all.

I can say with confidence that if Rwanda had instead changed the medium of instruction from French to Rwandese, it would not be the much admired fastest growing African economy it is today.

The change from French to English was a step up, not a step down as will be the case with Tanzania's policy choices.

Let's pause and think and ultimately make decisions that will allow Tanzanians to grow.

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