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Section 3:
Language in socio-economic development

The language factor in development goals

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Introduction

As a starting point in the consideration of the language factor in development goals, it is important to stress that development is not simply socio-economic, but much broader in scope. When development is narrowly circumscribed such that it relates to growth in production, rise in gross domestic product (GDP) or per capita income, wealth distribution, and foreign direct investment (Ngara, 2011), the situation it describes is more appropriately recognised as economic growth rather than economic development. The former may be equated with the quantitative value of goods and services, while the latter is the wellbeing of citizens. It is in this context that it is possible to have economic growth without economic development. Thus, a nation may record rising GDP from year to year, while a majority of the citizens live in abject poverty (Titilola, 2013). The slogan 'Development is about People' (Ajayi, 2000; Nyerere, as quoted in the Preface to Battaille, 1976) aptly sums up the broad scope of development. Any meaningful development must aim at 'the full realisation of the human potential and a maximum utilisation of the nation's resources for the benefit of all'. (Bamgbose, 1991: 44) The main thrust of this text is that development, whether narrowly or broadly defined, cannot be achieved unless it involves the participation of all in the development process, and such participation inevitably requires that people are reached and are able to reach others in the language or languages in which they are competent (Bamgbose, 1982).

Purpose of development goals

Setting goals to achieve planned growth is a favourite strategy employed by national governments as well as intergovernmental organisations. In addition to annual budgetary provisions that address recurrent and capital expenditure in the various sectors of the economy, it is considered useful to situate annual budgetary exercise within a more explicit forecast of development goals. Hence, the resort to periodic national development plans or even long-term plans such as Nigeria's Vision 20:2020, the main objective of which is to position Nigeria to become one of the world's 20 leading economies by the year 2020, or South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision for 2030, which aims at key infrastructural development as well as poverty reduction and combating inequality.

At regional, continental and global levels, development goals set an agenda that member states are expected to implement and achieve within a given timeframe.

The main advantages of development goals are situating economic activities and expenditure within a planning framework; setting of objectives and targets; identifying components and sectors at which transformational efforts are required; identifying actors in the various processes; specifying means and modality of implementation; and providing a focus for the most effective ways of achieving the stated objective within the development enterprise.

Development goals in Africa: NEPAD and MDGs

Two examples of development goals being pursued in Africa at the moment are the African Union (AU) New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations (UN) sponsored Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Originally initiated by three African Presidents, NEPAD was adopted as an AU economic development plan in 2001. It has as its goals the four primary objectives of eradication of poverty, promotion of sustainable growth and development, integration of Africa into the world economy and empowerment of women. An important byproduct, of this grand plan is the creation of a conducive, democratic environment intended to be achieved through good governance, for which an African Peer Review Mechanism was established. Specifically, NEPAD envisages:

1. Achievement of a growth rate of seven per cent GDP per annum in the next 15 years.

2. Achievement of all the UN-stipulated MDGs.

3. Capacity building through infrastructure, especially ICT and energy, human resources, skills development and reversal of brain drain, health, agriculture and access to markets of developed countries for African exports.

4. Transformation of other sectors including transport, water and sanitation, the environment, culture (particularly indigenous knowledge), science and technology, mining, manufacturing, and tourism (NEPAD, 2001).

The UN-sponsored MDGs are based on an eight-point agenda adopted by the UN in 2000 intended to be achieved by the year 2015. These goals, highlighted in **bold** below, with their amplification, in terms of targets, are as follows:

1. **Eradication of poverty and extreme hunger** and reducing their incidence by half between 1990 and 2015.

2. **Achievement of universal primary education by 2015**, with all boys and girls completing a full course of primary education.

3. **Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women**. In particular, elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015.

4. **Reduction of child mortality**. In particular reduction by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, of the under-five mortality rate.

5. **Improvement of maternal health**. In particular, reduction by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015 the maternal mortality ratio and achieve by 2015 universal access to reproductive health.

6. **Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**, with a view to halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, achieving by 2010 universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS, and halting and beginning to reverse by 2015 the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

7. **Ensure environmental sustainability** by integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes to reverse loss of environmental resources, reducing biodiversity loss while achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the rate of loss, reducing by half by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and to have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

8. **Development of a global partnership for development**. In particular, developing an open, non-discriminatory financial and trading system and dealing comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through measures that will make the debt sustainable in the long term.

African underperformance in development goals

Persistent reports in the implementation of development goals have tended to underscore underperformance, either in terms of a shortfall in the targets attained or in terms of inadequate pursuit of specific goals. Several development plans intended to transform the backward state of the economy such as Nigeria's cycle of National Development Plans from 1962–85, the Green Revolution, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Programme (NEEDS) have been subject to distortion or in part abandoned (Titilola, op cit). Pretty much the same strictures have been made concerning the various schemes initiated for Africa by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO), such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), involving globalisation, free market, deregulation, privatisation and strict budget controls, leading to reduction of expenditure on social services (South African Churches, 2002; Anyaoku, 2008; Djité, 2008; Chumbow, 2009).

In the light of the above background of failed development plans, it would not be surprising if both NEPAD and MDGs were to suffer the same fate. Critics of NEPAD have identified deficiencies in its structures, modalities and vision, particularly its dependency syndrome as typified by excessive emphasis on globalisation and market fundamentalism at the expense of people-oriented goals (Kambur, 2002; South African Churches, op cit; Djité, op cit). On the tenth anniversary of NEPAD in 2011, while the CEO, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, in an interview with the online magazine *Africa Renewal* claimed that NEPAD had achieved a lot in the ten years of its existence, most observers outside the organisation express a dissenting view. Typical of this adverse opinion is the following telling comment:

> *Well ten years have now elapsed and this is the time to make a sober assessment on NEPAD and pass judgment whether it has been on the path to success or not. From my perspective, the initiative, despite its intellectual appeal and clearly defined goals, has been a terrible failure; it has brought no substantive change to Africa in terms of transforming the continent's economies or improving the livelihoods of the mass of the African people – which confirms the critics' view, upon the launch of NEPAD, that the project was a 'non-starter'.* Evarist Kagaruki (2011)

In the case of MDGs, there have been extensive reports by various organisations including the UN, which issues period reports on progress made, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Union (AU) and the MDG Africa Steering Group (see UN, 2013; ECA/AU, 2008; MDG Africa Steering Group, 2008). The summary of the latest reports, particularly as they affect African nations, is that although progress has been made in respect of certain goals such as reduction of extreme hunger and extreme poverty, a lot still needs to be done about such goals as infant mortality rate, maternal deaths, access to HIV/AIDS retroviral drugs, differential access to primary and secondary education between rich and poor, gender inequalities, rural–urban gap and environmental sustainability. With only one year to the deadline of 2015, the realistic prospect is that Africa will not meet most of the MDGs.

Another measure of how Africa is faring in terms of development is the Human Development Index (HDI), which is an aggregate of several indicators including health, education, population, poverty, social wellbeing (including employment and security), capital in-flows, innovation and technology, and environment. Obviously, most of the indicators are also goals in the MDGs. The countries of the world are grouped into four categories: Very High Human Development, High Human Development, Medium Human Development and Low Human Development. In the 2012 ranking, just as in the ranking in previous years, no African country is ranked Very High or High. The highest rank attained in 2012 by an African country is Medium Human Development and only ten African countries (Gabon, Egypt, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Morocco, Cape Verde, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea and Swaziland) have been able to attain this rank. All other African countries are in the category of Low Human Development. The highest-ranked African country is Gabon at number 106 out of 185 in the world, and the lowest is Mozambique at number 185 (UNDP, 2013). Perhaps with the discovery of substantial natural gas reserves, this country will attain a higher rank in subsequent reports. What are the implications of these rankings? If the path to development is to be found in the prescribed plans and goals, there is obviously something wrong in the way African countries have been pursuing these goals.

There is no dearth of explanation as to why Africa has been lagging behind in development. For example, for the failure of expected NEPAD goals in agriculture, the following explanation is advanced:

According to CAADP [Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme] the reasons of agricultural underdevelopment are various. Some are continuing dependence on uncertain rainfall, nutritional deficiencies in Africa's soils, small and dispersed domestic markets,

the instability and decline of world prices for African agricultural exports, the small size of most farms, farmers' frequent lack of organisation, the lack of rural roads, neglect of the particular needs of women farmers (who produce most of the continent's food), and the spread of HIV/AIDS, poor government agricultural policies, low investment in farming sector and lack of technological apparatus. (Bostan, 2011: 15,937)

Similarly, in a study commissioned by the UN in connection with the MDGs, the slow rate of progress in their development was attributed to five factors: high transport costs and small markets; low productivity agriculture; high disease burden; adverse political history; and slow diffusion of external technology (Sachs, 2005). The MDG Africa Steering Group, which made extensive recommendations on how to overcome the perceived deficit in the realisation of the MDGs, also proffered socio-economic and political solutions. For example, after correctly observing that 'Africa as a whole is off track to meeting the MDGs on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating infectious disease (i.e., MDGs 4, 5 and 6),' (MDG Africa Steering Group, 2008: 13) it went on to recommend increased donor support as well as strategies by governments for extending primary healthcare facilities, provision of emergency obstetric care and measures for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS infection.

Language as the missing link

It is significant to observe that in all the reasons advanced for failure to attain development goals, no mention has been made of language as a contributory factor. This is not surprising as the tendency has always been to view development narrowly in socio-economic terms and to the neglect of the human factor. For example, neither the blueprint on NEPAD nor that on MDGs (NEPAD, 2001; UNDP website, n.d.) refers to language at all. It bears repeating, as has often been stressed by language scholars, that development is not possible without language. As pointed out earlier, as long as development is about people, the contribution that they are called upon to make by way of participation will require communication, dissemination of information, sharing of knowledge, feedback and acquisition of skills. None of these activities can be achieved without language.

As an alternative to the neglect of language as a factor in development, the other approach is recognition that language does matter but the language must necessarily be an imported official language such as English or French in Africa. Again, this is a narrow conception of development, which tends to equate it with the formal economy and modernisation, which is the preserve of the educated élite who form only a negligible percentage of the population.

Even the assumption that an official language, such as English, is a superior instrument for development has been seriously questioned through empirical research (Arcand and Grin, 2013). If development is meant for the entire population of a country, there is no way the majority of the people, often mainly illiterate, can be excluded. Experience has shown that the formal economy on which development is predicated is only a fraction of the informal economy, which is dominated by rural dwellers using their own languages for agricultural, commercial and other economic activities (Djité, op cit).

The British Council-sponsored international Language and Development conference represented recognition of the need to factor in language in matters concerning development. In spite of the obvious interest in showing the relevance of English, it is commendable to observe that contributors to the conferences have felt free to explore the most appropriate policy for each country, including the choice of language in a multilingual situation (See, for instance, several of the contributions to Coleman, 2011). I intend to follow this tradition by critically examining the place of African languages in the realisation of the MDGs. For the avoidance of doubt, as long as English continues to be an official language and the language of higher education, its role as the language of the boardroom, the language of research, policy formulation and diplomacy is assured. However, since the vast majority of the population in those African countries in which English is the official language are not competent in the language, the brunt of the realisation of the MDGs will necessarily have to be borne by indigenous African languages.

One of the earliest efforts to draw attention to the importance of language in MDG realisation was the 16-page brochure published by SIL International, documenting through various case studies how participation by stakeholders in the pursuit of the MDGs improved through literacy as well as audio and video information in local languages (SIL International, 2008). The second major effort was the International Conference on Language, Education and Millennium Development Goals held in Bangkok, Thailand between 9 and 11 November 2010. The aim was to draw attention to the linkage between language and education and the achievement of MDGs as well as the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the need to incorporate and support their integration in all the strategies for achieving the goals. The report on the conference was given the apt title, *Why Language Matters for the Millennium Development Goals* (UNESCO Bangkok, 2012).

The role of language

A critical look at all the MDGs shows that all of them (including even MDG 8, which concerns mainly government-to-government dealings in a global partnership such as trade, debt management and donor support, but which also includes a commitment to good governance) require an indigenous language as a necessary tool. Whether we are looking at infant mortality, maternal health, education or prevention of HIV/AIDS, we need to interact with the target populations, which are best reached in their own languages. As an illustration of how language can aid the realisation of development goals, let us take a look at four domains: communication and information dissemination, transfer of technology, education and good governance (See also Bamgbose, 2011).

(a) Communication and information dissemination

A crucial aspect of development is the participation of beneficiaries in the development process. Without such participation, not much can be achieved. For example, it is reported that development initiatives that were done with the involvement of beneficiaries had a success rate of 68 per cent as compared with ten per cent for those done without beneficiaries' involvement (UNESCO Bangkok, 2012). Such involvement requires communication and dissemination of information in a language that the beneficiaries are competent in, usually their own language or languages.

For example, farmers in rural areas have to know about high-yielding crop varieties which may have been developed in research institutes such as the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) at Ibadan in Nigeria. They need to be shown how to use fertilisers and how to store and preserve yields from their farms. The way this can best be done is through extension services provided to farmers' co-operatives. This presupposes that those who provide such services must be able to communicate with the farmers in their language. This is the ideal. In practice, we find that many of those called upon to interact with farmers are ill equipped to do so. Bodomo (1996) tells the story of some young agricultural extension workers who were forced to confront their inadequacy on their very first day on the job. They knew all the theory, but did not reckon that they would be providing guidance to largely illiterate rural farmers who do not speak English, the language of their academic training.

What is true of agriculture is also true of all the health-related MDGs such as maternal health, child mortality, and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Antenatal clinics, children's clinics and other hospital departments are aware that they need to reach their patients in a language in which the patients are comfortable in expressing themselves. Hence, they usually make provision for nurses who are bilingual in a patient's language and the official language of the country. Even this arrangement of using ad hoc interpreters in doctor–patient interaction is fraught with problems such as inaccurate interpreting, wrong diagnoses, lack of confidentiality and inability of patients to ask relevant questions about their treatment (Djité, op cit). Hence, there can be no substitute for health workers who can interact with patients in the languages those patients speak well or for pharmacists who can provide instructions on medication in the language of the patients.

Communication is a two-way process involving someone talking to a target audience. The audience is, however, not passive, for reactions, feedback and questions are expected. A common mistake often made in dissemination of information is to assume that the target audience is fed with facts and may not have views of its own. There is a need to find out what the audience already knows and what more can be added to this. Sometimes the purveyor of information may even be less knowledgeable in some matters. For instance, some first-class graduates of agricultural economics and extension are reported to be unable to name or identify five varieties of yams in their own language, a knowledge that is easily at the fingertips of illiterate yam sellers in the market (Owolabi, 2013). No doubt, these graduates can reel out names of different varieties of yam in their accustomed scientific jargon (for example *Dioscorea rotundata* 'white yam', *Dioscorea cayensis* 'yellow yam', *Dioscorea alata* 'water yam', *Dioscorea dumetorum* 'trifoliate yam'). In the development enterprise, there is a need for humility, in particular, to recognise indigenous knowledge as enshrined in oral tradition, folklore and proverbs. In health delivery, for example, insights from traditional medicine about local herbs and their uses may well supplement knowledge from orthodox Western medicine.

(b) Transfer of technology

A major aspiration of developing countries is to be able to master how to manufacture goods instead of perpetually importing them from developed countries. The examples of Japan, China and South Korea are often cited as a model of how one can rise from dependency in manufacture of goods to becoming not only a master but an exporter of finished products. People tend to talk glibly of transfer of technology. In actual fact, there can be no transfer of technology. Any foreign technology brought into one country from another has to be mastered and domesticated. How often have we heard of imported expensive machinery breaking down and the users needing to bring in technicians from abroad to service the machines? For developing countries to become industrial players, a conscious plan will have to be developed to transmit the manufacturing processes into easily understood routines. As I have pointed out elsewhere: *'Foreign ideas, concepts, and technology will undoubtedly be imported in a foreign language, but such concepts must be transmitted to the masses in the language they can understand. The economic miracle achieved by countries such as Japan was not based on a widespread dissemination of English; rather it is the result of the indigenisation of such technology into terms that the ordinary factory hand can understand.'* (Bamgbose, 1991: 51)

(c) Education

MDG 2, the second of the eight-point MDGs, envisages achievement of universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 with all boys and girls completing a full course of primary education. Simple as this looks, there is no chance that the target will be attained, even with the efforts of the global scheme of Education for All (EFA), which has preceded the MDGs. Apart from purely socio-economic challenges such as poverty, discrimination against girls, poor funding, school fees, etc. (MDG Africa Steering Group, 2008) that continue to impede access to primary education, a major factor, which reports are usually silent about, is the language of learning and teaching in schools. The point is that even if Africa could achieve full enrolment of all children in primary schools, the goal of completing the full primary education course may still not be met. It is reported that the average completion rate for children in primary schools in Africa is 60 per cent (ECA/AU, 2008). Why is the dropout rate still high? The reason is largely to be found in the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP).

In most African countries south of the Sahara, the language of primary education is either the child's mother tongue for the first three years of primary education or an imported official language for the entire duration of primary education. Departures from this practice are to be found in only a handful of countries or in experimental projects. The fact that an imported official language is used for teaching and learning throughout or from the fourth year of primary education is a major impediment to learning in schools, resulting as it does in high dropout, failure or repeat rates. Unless and until this policy is changed and every child is allowed to undertake basic education in a mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education, so long will the goal of 100 per cent completion of primary education for all pupils continue to be a mirage! In fact, no meaningful economic development can be achieved until such education is embarked upon in earnest as a priority in educational policy (Alexander, 2011).

(d) Good governance

Commitment to good governance by governments is a requirement in MDG 8. Also in NEPAD, good governance is recognised as an enabling, conducive and democratic environment for the proper realisation of development goals for which a special mechanism, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), has been established. African governments are committed to good governance and agree to subject themselves to periodic evaluation by their peers to measure the degree of compliance with good governance.

Good governance entails participatory democracy and this, in turn, entails the populace being well informed about issues which affect their lives and on which their rulers deliberate from time to time. Such information requires communication with them, and in the multilingual context of the African continent with a high degree of illiteracy, only the African languages known to the masses will be adequate for this purpose. Hence, relevant provisions of a country's constitution, party manifestos and programmes, electoral rules and voting procedures, proceedings in the legislature and budgetary allocation to projects in constituencies must be distilled and packaged in a way that they will be accessible to the electorate, including even those in rural areas. News broadcasts in African languages, feature programmes on television, information through community radios and town hall meetings at which local languages are the medium of interaction are some of the ways for keeping people informed. For those that are literate in African languages, translations and print media in African languages will be additional sources of information.

Apart from the benefit of wider participation beyond the elite, which the use of African languages will achieve, one other advantage is that a well-informed citizenry cannot be easily hoodwinked. As I have pointed out elsewhere: 'Bad governance thrives on ignorance. That is why dictators and undemocratic governments exploit ignorance by keeping the people uninformed'. (Bamgbose, 2008: 31) Corruption, which has become endemic in Africa, can also be said to thrive on ignorance. In the ranking of countries of the world in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by Transparency International, statistics for 2012 show that only three African countries fall in the category of countries ranked as the 50 least corrupt in the world (Botswana at number 30, Cape Verde at number 39, and Rwanda at number 50). Fifteen more countries fall in the category of countries ranked as the 100 least corrupt, while as many as 31 fall in the group ranked as the world's most corrupt countries, with Somalia at number 174 ranking as the world's most corrupt country, a dubious distinction which it shares with Afghanistan and North Korea (Transparency International, 2012).

Knowledge of one's rights and relevant regulations may assist one in resisting extortion. More importantly, those who engage in corrupt practices in the anonymous environment of the cities will not find it easy to do the same in their local communities, where fear of bringing shame to their families may be a strong disincentive. The role of language in good governance is, therefore, to widen the scope of participation and to ensure that citizens can make informed judgements on the basis of knowledge as well as hold those who rule in their name accountable.

The role of culture

Although I have said much about the role of language, it is important to point out that culture is also an important factor in the realisation of MDGs. A people's customs, beliefs, traditions and practices may affect the way one reacts to new ideas and situations. To illustrate this, it is sufficient merely to take a look at the education, gender and health-related goals.

(a) Education and gender equality (MDGs 2, 3)

MDG 2 envisages all boys and girls completing a full course of primary education, while MDG 3 would like any gender disparity between boys and girls in terms of access to education to be eliminated. The root cause of disparity is often to be found in attitudes to the girl-child in many African communities. Illiterate parents often prefer to have their sons educated, since it is the sons that will carry on the family name and prestige. Hence, it is not unusual to prefer sending a boy to secondary school or university while the girl is encouraged to find a job or even get married. There are also cases of girls being withdrawn from school and given in marriage to older men. These unwholesome attitudes must be combated if MDGs 2 and 3 are to be achieved.

(b) Reduction of child mortality (MDG 4)

MDG 4 has the objective of reducing child mortality. This immediately raises the question of child-rearing practices that may impede attainment of this objective. Nutrition, traditional medicines, traditional ideas about diseases and causes of early death in children are some areas that can exacerbate child mortality. A good balanced diet is essential for children, but how does one combat the belief that giving children plenty of meat will cause them to have worms? Doctors prescribe medication but this does not stop some parents from patronising sellers of herbal concoctions, which they believe may be more potent or at least should be taken to supplement orthodox Western medicine. Ideas about certain medical conditions may run counter to scientific diagnosis. An example of this is

swollen lymphatic nodes, which occur when the immune system is trying to fight an infection. In some communities, these swollen nodes are treated as foreign bodies that must be excised. In a community where a child's death is attributed to supernatural causes (i.e. the child keeps going and coming back to the world), it is difficult to persuade those who hold such views that the cause of death may be due to preventable natural causes. Recently, in Nigeria, immunisation against the wild polio virus suffered a serious setback when a rumour was spread that it was a plot to reduce the fertility of the girl-child! For reduction in child mortality to be effective, health workers must be aware of these cultural impediments.

(c) Improvement of maternal health (MDG 5)

To some extent, the achievement of MDG 5 depends on improvement in the status of a woman. In societies which are male-dominant and the woman is a wife, mother, cook, nurse and farm help, who is expected to labour from morning 'til evening without a helping hand from the husband, it will be no wonder if her health suffers in the process. Added to this is the obnoxious practice of female genital mutilation, which may cause serious complications during childbirth, and that of child marriage, which has often led to premature pregnancies and deliveries causing immature organs to tear thereby resulting in *vesico vaginal fistula* (VVF). Many women have been permanently damaged and many have died as a result of these conditions. Women are constantly encouraged to go for family planning in order to space out or even stop child bearing. Such counsel may not have taken into consideration the belief of some communities that children are like unfertilised eggs in a hen and they should not be allowed to stop coming. According to this belief, to do so may even have untold consequences. Finally, some practices are also self-inflicted. A good example of this is the use of skin-lightening creams by women in an attempt to 'look pretty'. A foreign idea (popularised by models in magazines) of a beautiful woman being one with a light skin seems to have been uncritically accepted, especially by educated African women. Is 'black' no longer 'beautiful'? The long-term effect of the use of skin-lightening creams on maternal health is a source of concern.

(d) Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6)

Substantial progress has been made in combating the scourge of HIV/AIDS in many African countries. This may have been due to the relentless campaign by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the substantial funding by foreign donors as well as national efforts. Centres for testing one's HIV status and for treatment are to be found in many urban areas. So also is the reasonable availability of antiretroviral drugs. The prescriptions for preventing infection, which are popularised in radio and television jingles, drama sketches and advertisements in the media,

are now household knowledge. One prescription that may have cultural implications is the counsel to avoid multiple sex partners. In a polygamous set-up, this is simply an impossible prescription. What is even more serious is the belief that multiple sex partnerships enhances male virility and, conversely, that having a single sex partner ultimately induces impotence. The latter belief is usually captured in the Nigerian Pidgin expression *won toto de kill prick*. Such beliefs have to be confronted and debunked in order to minimise the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

Arising from the preceding discussion of the pitfalls in the conception of development goals, particularly as outlined in the MDGs, there is need to re-evaluate the strategies of development goals to include:

• a departure from narrowly seeing development as a socio-economic activity

• a recognition of the role of language and culture in the development process

• fostering of an enabling environment for human development, which is the basis of any meaningful development

• provision for mass participation

• insistence on the need for self-reliance and sensitisation of development partners to local realities, including language, culture and indigenous knowledge.

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'**Africa, of necessity, should actively participate in the post-2015 development agenda.** This will ensure that Africa's African Dream as stated in Africa's Agenda 2063 is part of the many dreams of people across the world. This will ensure that whatever comes out of the debates on the post-2015 agenda does neither alienate Africa nor undermine it.'

Professor Sozinho Francisco Matsinhe

African languages: towards an African cultural renaissance

Sozinho Francisco Matsinhe, Executive Secretary, ACALAN

We need to have a collective discourse that will mobilise all Africans, using the languages they know best – African Languages

Introduction

The tenth International Conference on Language and Development coincided with Africa's jubilee celebrations, as the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU) completed 50 and ten years of existence respectively in 2013. The celebrations ran until May 2014 under the theme 'Pan-Africanism and Cultural Renaissance'. The total liberation of Africa from colonial domination and racial discrimination stands out as one of the major achievements of the OAU. Notwithstanding instability in some parts of the continent and the situation in Western Sahara, Africa is a free continent and the ballot box is more and more becoming the most credible means of ascending to power across the continent. As a result, there has been an increase in the movement of people and goods across Africa, which has enhanced mutual knowledge and cultural cross-fertilisation among the African people. Following these achievements, the focus has to be shifted to poverty eradication as a way of changing the lives of the majority of Africans for the better.

In order to lend substance to the desire to eradicate poverty in Africa, the OAU and its successor AU have designed and endorsed development programmes either on their own or in collaboration with other organisations such as international aid agencies, the United Nations, the African Development Bank (ADB) and many others. Incalculable amounts of financial resources have been committed to support those programmes. However, the results are not commensurate with the efforts and the resources made available. In other words, political freedom has been achieved, but economic freedom appears to remain as elusive as ever. This has been a cause for concern for various stakeholders. For instance, in a joint Millennium Development Goals report produced in 2011, the AU, ADB and the UN (represented by ECA and UNDP) observed that:

The pace of progress in halving poverty rates, creating productive employment and reducing hunger and malnutrition has been very slow. Favourable trends in poverty reduction were reversed by global shocks and the absolute number of the working poor is on the rise.

Indeed, more than one out of every two workers is poor (i.e. earns less than US$ 1.25 per day), and this figure is expected to rise. High youth unemployment, particularly among youth in North Africa, is another growing area of concern, given its potential for igniting conflict and social unrest. (AU, ADB, ECA and UNDP, 2011: 122)

Salim Ahmed Salim, a former Secretary General of the OAU, appears to share this concern, when he poses the following questions:

Why is it a continent, which is one of the richest if not the richest in terms of resources both human and material, continues to have the poorest people? How can we rationally explain the continued and in some cases escalating internal conflicts in some parts of our continent with attendant loss of millions of lives, human misery and destruction as well as forcing millions of our people to vote with their feet? (Salim 2014: 2)

The idea of African Cultural Renaissance, referred to earlier, has been intrinsically linked to the call for Africa to return to its roots. I suggest that Africa's jubilee celebrations should be a moment for soul searching about the most viable strategies to bring about sustainable development that is not only inspired and informed by Africa's culture, but that also changes the lives of the majority of Africans for the better, leading to durable peace and stability. Therefore, Africa needs to have a collective discourse that will mobilise all Africans around shared goals and vision. In order for that to happen, they need to communicate effectively, using the languages they know best – African languages.

This paper is organised as follows. After this introduction, the second section considers Africa's post-independence development initiatives, focusing on the reasons why they have failed to produce the desired results, pointing out that their failure can be attributed to a top-down approach and too much dependence on external resources, which deprived the Africans of a chance to unlock their potential and actively participate in the development process that would free them from poverty. The third section deals with the concept of development, emphasising the need to adopt a broader approach to development that goes beyond economic growth to include non-economic elements, while gauging the level of development. Finally, before the conclusion, the fourth section argues that the soul searching and the African Cultural Renaissance should be viewed as an integral part of the current development

initiatives. These include the Second Decade of Education for Africa aimed at reforming Africa's education systems and the Decision on Linkage between Culture and Education, which has bearing on the postulations of the Second Decade of Education, as it stipulates that the content for the curriculum for education in Africa should take into account Africa's cultural reality. It also considers Africa's most recent development initiative – Africa's Agenda 2063 – which calls for a holistic, horizontal and participatory approach to development, which will allow Africans to take a lead in the development process, in an environment whereby culture and language play a significant role in that process, and which includes the creation of partnerships between African languages and former colonial languages.

In what follows, some of the main OAU- and AU-backed development initiatives are briefly considered, but before doing that perhaps it is worth recalling the following African proverbs that seem to lend weight to the main arguments presented in this paper:

(a) Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you.

(b) If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

The search for sustainable development and poverty eradication

As referred to earlier, the refocus on bringing about sustainable development that eradicates poverty has prompted the OAU and the AU to develop various plans of action and strategies such as the Lagos Plan of Action for Africa, the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, Relaunching Africa's Economic and Social Development: the Cairo Agenda for Action, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (cf. Africa Institute of South Africa, 2002), the Second Decade of Education for Africa (cf. AU, 2006a) and, currently, the Africa's Agenda 2063, which aims at addressing the question related to the type of continent Africans will have when the OAU and the AU celebrate 100 and 60 years respectively (cf. AU, 2014). Furthermore, the Africa's Agenda 2063 lends substance to the ideals of the African Renaissance, as it is imbued with the desire of Africa writing and celebrating her own narrative while owning her own destiny. The narrative will be written not only in the

former colonial languages, but also in African languages spoken by the majority of Africans and which they use to express their worldview. This, in a way, will see Africa establish and celebrate linguistic equity, whereby former colonial languages and African languages thrive in a genuine partnership in all domains of society, transcending the linguistic barrier that has been mainly responsible for the failure of taking the OAU and AU to grassroots. Thus, realising the wish of the founding fathers of the OAU, expressed in article XXIX of the OAU Charter that 'the working languages of the Organisation and all its institutions shall be, if possible, African languages, English, and French, Arabic and Portuguese'. (OAU, 1963) As we shall see later, the creation of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), as a specialised institution of the African Union, entrusted with the task of working with the member states of the Union towards the development and promotion of African languages, constitutes a serious attempt to make the 'if possible' in the article mentioned above 'possible'.

Returning to the programmes and strategies the OAU and AU have developed in an attempt to bring about sustainable development and win the struggle against poverty, we find that, except for the Second Decade Education for Africa, which ends in 2015, and the Africa's Agenda 2063, none of the others has produced the desired results. It is important to note, however, that the effectiveness of the implementation of Education for Africa has yet to be assessed and that the implementation strategies for Africa's Agenda are still the subject of an open and wide debate (as mentioned above).

Given all that, the fundamental question is: If they have been endorsed by all the member states at the level of heads of state and government, why is it that they have failed to produce the desired and expected results? While trying to provide answers to this question, Tesha suggests that three aspects should be taken into consideration.

> First, the initiatives must be home grown, participatory and democratically conceived and implemented. Second, such initiatives should be backed with African resources, both financial and human. More precisely, there can be no ownership without the capacity to implement such ideas, policies and strategies. Ownership goes with responsibility and accountability. Africa has the potential to discharge its responsibilities for the implementation of its own ideas and initiatives. Lastly, influence of the international community should be confined to a facilitating role. (2002: 16)

The issue of ownership, conception and implementation of the programmes that form the essence of the first suggestion are critical. In order to support these programmes, Africans need not only to own them, but also to identify themselves with them. As already suggested, this largely requires the creation of a collective discourse that will mobilise all Africans around those programmes and initiatives. Such discourse can only be possible in an environment of linguistic equity suggested earlier. And only the use of languages Africans know best – African languages – can make that possible.

The development of Africa means economic freedom for Africans, which will allow them to use their own resources to their own advantage. It is therefore not likely that those who have been benefiting from Africa's underdevelopment will provide financial resources to support initiatives or programmes meant to bring about genuine development to Africa. The conventional wisdom is that it is not possible to ask a wire from a lion to set a snare to catch it! That is perhaps why, as Moyo (2009) points out, despite enormous financial resources transferred to Africa in the form of aid, not much has been achieved in terms of reducing the levels of poverty. Instead, aid has patronised Africans, creating the belief that they are unable to generate their own funds to run their own affairs. It was certainly with all that in mind that the chairperson of the African Union, Dr Dlamini-Zuma, requested General Obasanjo, the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to chair a commission to investigate alternative sources of funding the programmes of the African Union. The proposals from this commission will probably form part of the agendas for the forthcoming summits of the AU. The experiences from the struggles for political independence across Africa lend weight to Tesha's argument in his last suggestion; Africans took the lead in those struggles and they received support from outside in terms of finances, logistics and training.

The main argument here is that a holistic approach is required for sustainable development to take place in Africa. Such an approach will not only require that Africans be the masters of their destiny, but it will also require fundamental changes in the conceptualisation of development supported by education systems whose contents are informed and inspired by Africa's culture and linguistic reality, as expressed in the postulation of the Second Decade of Education and Africa's Agenda 2063 referred to earlier, as well as in the AU's Khartoum Decision calling for the linkage between Culture and Education (AU, 2006b). This constitutes a point of departure from most suggestions on the best ways to achieve sustainable development in Africa, including those considered above.

Development: what is it and how can it be achieved?

The search for answers to these and many other related questions has been the subject of a protracted debate, which, as a result, has produced a considerable body of literature. Hence, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive critical review of literature on development, but to briefly consider the two commonly held views on development. The Breton Wood Institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have brought forward the first view and popularised it across the developing countries. This view equates economic growth with development. The IMF has therefore been organising conferences to praise developing countries for achieving sustained economic growth. It was in that context that the IMF organised a regional conference held in Maputo recently to assess the economic growth of Sub-Saharan countries. The IMF's Managing Director (see Lagarde, 2014) stated during her keynote address that:

> Sub-Saharan Africa is clearly taking off – growing strongly and steadily for nearly two decades and showing a remarkable resilience in the face of the global financial crisis. Economic stability has paid off. More than two-thirds of the countries in the region have enjoyed ten or more years of uninterrupted growth. This growth has delivered a more educated population, with significant decline in infant mortality.

It is true that Sub-Saharan countries have largely recorded significant economic growth. However, this economic growth has not yet taken these countries to anywhere they have never been before in terms of poverty alleviation. Put differently, economic growth has not yet changed the lives of the majority of Africans for the better. In fact, as the Managing Director of the IMF also admits in her keynote address, 'poverty remains stuck at unacceptably high levels'. (op.cit)

The second view on development seeks to broaden the concept of development. According to this view, economic growth is just one of the main indicators of development. Or, as Sen argues:

> Growth is not the same thing as development … But it can scarcely be denied that economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development. (1983: 5)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), while echoing Sen's argument, has since 1990 launched the annual Human Development Report (HDR), calling for a paradigm shift in the approach and measurement of development. According to the 1996 edition of the HDR dedicated to economic growth and development:

> There is no automatic link between economic growth and human development … Human development is the end – economic growth a means. (UNDP, 1996: 3)

It follows then that the paradigm shift the UNDP calls for requires the factoring in of the various non-economic elements or indictors involved in the complexity that exists between economic growth and development, when human development is assessed. This would not only provide a realistic approach to development, but would also explain the mismatch between economic growth and the levels of poverty referred to above still being obtained in African countries despite the economic growth recorded in recent years. Rassool (2007) suggests that the non-economic indicators should include the following when assessing economic development:

• Overall gains in societal literacy rates.

• Improvement in schooling provision, attendance and results.

• The ability to provide schooling in a child-safe environment nationally.

• Improvement in health conditions and services.

• Provision of adequate housing.

• A coherent and cohesive social organisation, that is, the degree of national integration and sense of national unity.

• The extent of mass communication, and level of access.

• The level of effectiveness of the country's financial institutions.

• Sustained political stability.

• The availability of a coherent social, economic and political infrastructure.

• A balanced economy comprised of different sectors, e.g. manufacturing and service industries, finance capital, commodities and agriculture.

• An adequately skilled labour supply to meet evolving national and international labour market needs.

The second view on development provides a more realistic approach to development but it leaves out important non-economic factors such as culture. In other words, it remains silent *vis-à-vis* the role language and culture can play in search of sustainable development. As the Director-General of UNESCO rightly argues in an article prepared for the Economic Co-operation and Development Review:

> *The power of culture must be recognised – development must be about human potential and capacity, and there is nothing more human than culture. Culture is an enabler and a driver for sustainable development. It has also an inherent, unqualifiable value as a source of strength and creativity essential for every individual and every society.* (Bokova 2013: 3)

Culture has an important role to play in development, for development is essentially a constant interaction of men and women against nature with the aim of changing their lives for the better. In doing so, they are engaged in a communication process that involves the cross-fertilisation of ideas, accumulation and sharing of experiences (cf. Gethaiga, 1998).

Soul searching: African Cultural Renaissance

The soul searching and the ideals of the African Cultural Renaissance are informed and inspired by the desire to seek African solutions to African problems. As such, they need to be anchored in the recent AU-backed development initiatives, such as the Second Decade of Education, the Resolution on the linkage between culture and education as well as Africa's Agenda 2063. In other words, for the soul searching to succeed it is necessary to consider these initiatives as different pieces of the same game.

The Second Decade of Education for Africa was launched in 2006 and will run until 2015. It calls for the overhauling of the education system for formal education in Africa and has the following areas of focus (AU, 2006a: 5):

(i)   Gender and culture.

(ii) Education management information systems.

(iii) Teacher development.

(iv) Tertiary development.

(v)   Technical and vocational education and training, including in difficult situations.

(vi) Curriculum, and teaching and learning materials.

(vii) Quality management.

As mentioned above, one of the main objectives of the Decade is to produce an education that is relevant to Africans and in line with the programmes meant to propel Africa into development. In fact, as Commey (2014) argues, while considering the challenges facing South Africa's education system, Africa requires an African-centred curriculum that will reflect the life and experiences of Africans. This type of education can instil self-esteem into Africans, change their mindset so that they cherish their culture and values, and appreciate the need to return to their roots, which is at the heart of the soul searching process. Indeed, as Maathai (2009) puts more elegantly, culture gives a sense of self and identity. It then follows that a person without a culture is like a tree without roots and, as such, cannot withstand strong winds. In that way, relevant education to Africans becomes an essential element in the search for sustainable development in Africa. As scholars such as Thompson (1981) and Green (2008) observe, relevant education is one of the means that leads to freedom from poverty. Or, as UNESCO (2012: 11) puts the same point more succinctly: 'Education is one of the most important ways for people to move out of poverty.'

All the areas of focus are essential for the achievement of the objectives of the Second Decade of Education for Africa. However, the successful implementation of any education system requires committed and well-trained teachers. In fact, as Education International reminds us in one of its slogans: 'No educational system is better than its teachers'. It is therefore critical that, as the Decade comes to an end in 2015, areas of focus in (iii) and (vi) feature prominently in the assessment of the implementation of the Decade as well as in the post-2015 agenda.

The Decision on the linkage between Culture and Education has a bearing on the objectives of the Decade, as it requires that, in order for education to be relevant to Africans, the content of its curriculum should be informed and inspired by African culture (AU, 2006b). Taking into account that language is the depository and vehicle of culture, ACALAN has been given the responsibility of following up with the AU member states the implementation of the Decision and reporting back to the Africa Union Commission regularly (AU, 2006b).

Africa's Agenda 2063, as mentioned earlier, is Africa's most recent attempt in her search for a development formula. As stated in the document known as the resource kit for the AUC, AU organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECSs), Africa's Agenda 2063:

Seeks to harness the continent's competitive advantages embodied in its people, history, cultures and natural resources, geo-political position to effect equitable and people-centered growth and development to eradicate poverty; develop Africa's human capital; social assets, infrastructure and public goods, enduring peace and security, effective and strong development states, participatory and accountable institutions; empower women and youth to fulfil the African Dream. (AU, 2014: 5)

The desire to adopt a horizontal and participatory approach calling for the participations of all Africans in the implementation of the Agenda, including the youth, and the recognition of the role culture plays in development sets Africa's Agenda 2063 apart from the development programmes and strategies so far considered. Culture has been absent in the development discourse particularly in the African context because it is generally either reduced to performance, especially during festive occasions or associated with backwardness (cf. Bokova, 2013).

Language, although it is not openly mentioned in the Agenda, is subsumed under culture. For language is the depository and vehicle of culture. It plays an important role, as it is not only a tool for communication, but it is also the means through which people share and store experiences and pass them on future generations. In this regard UNESCO, in a document entitled *Language Matters for the Millennium Development Goals*, remarks that:

People's languages are vitally important to them. Through language, people communicate, share meaning and experience their sense of individual and community identity. Genuine participation obviously relies on a two-way communication, which means engaging with the languages people actually speak. (2012: 4)

Taking these remarks, as well as the linguistic situation in Africa into account, in order to increase the chances of Africa's Agenda achieving its objectives, an environment of linguistic equity formed by partnerships between African languages that are spoken by the majority of Africans and the former colonial languages has to prevail. All this will create the necessary conditions for the African people to identify themselves with Africa's Agenda 2063 and become the architects and heroes of the African Dream. Previous AU-backed development initiatives partly failed to achieve their objectives due to the almost exclusive use of former colonial languages to the detriment of African languages and, by so doing, they alienated the majority of Africans who speak these languages (cf. Alexander, 2013).

Conclusion

All in all, Africa requires a holistic and people-centred development, which brings together all the programmes and allows Africans to become active agents of change of their lives for the better and beneficiaries of that change.

However, the success of soul searching embedded in the ideals of the African Cultural Renaissance is a long process whose success cannot depend only on the efforts of the Africans. It should also be regarded as Africa's contribution to the efforts to eradicate poverty worldwide. This entails that Africa, of necessity, should actively participate in the post-2015 development agenda. This will ensure that Africa's African Dream as stated in Africa's Agenda 2063 is part of the many dreams of people across the world. This will ensure that whatever comes out of the debates on the post-2015 agenda does neither alienate Africa nor undermine it.

Africa needs to constantly evaluate the progress and the challenges registered while pursuing its African dream as part and parcel of its soul searching. By doing so, it will be possible to align the ideals of the dream with the dynamics of the globalised world. Otherwise, the African dream will dissipate into the vicissitude of the globalised world. It is axiomatic that 'the one who joins a hunting expedition without a gun or a shield becomes an easy prey'. The soul searching intrinsically linked to the idea of African Cultural Renaissance couched in the Africa's Agenda 2063 is Africa's shield.

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Language as a contributor to post-MDG development perspectives in Africa

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Development perspectives up to and beyond 2015

In order to investigate the best ways forward for the European Union (EU) in supporting the education sector, the European Commission commissioned a study on donor policies, practices and investment priorities in education (Mercer, 2013). The study examined the overall development policy or strategy documents of 18 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) countries, three multilateral agencies and UNICEF, which deals with the sector as a whole. The period covered was mainly from 2005 to 2012, although some reference was made to earlier policies and strategies.

Priority to Africa

Mercer (2013) notes that donors have signalled their commitment to achieving the MDGs in Africa at several high-level events, such as UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) summits and the Gleneagles G8 meetings, by giving priority to the continent in the allocation of aid resources. In June 2005 the Member States of the EU agreed to double aid between 2004 and 2010, and to allocate half of the increase to Africa.[1] The commitment to Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, was re-confirmed in 13 of the 22 development policies under review, with seven donor governments[2] stipulating that Africa should receive the highest priority in development co-operation.

Education as a priority

For 17 of the 22 donors making up this study, education was highlighted as an important area for development co-operation. Some donors were more specific about the importance of education within their overall development policy. For example, Germany states that it will be 'combating the causes of poverty by investing in education, economic development, crisis prevention and health'. (BMZ, 2011) In the UK, 'changing children's lives through learning' is specified as one of eight main areas of DFID's work (DFID,

2011). Similarly, the Asian Development Bank has set out to refocus its operations into five core specialisations, one of which is education (AsDB, 2008).

Quality of education

Mercer (2013) found by analysing the many donor policies on educational quality that no strategies mention the crucial matter of which language children learn best in. Though the donors give a priority to Africa and agree that education should be a main area for development co-operation they do not discuss the language in which education in Africa is to take place. The donor countries themselves use their own languages as languages of instruction but seem to give no thought to the fact that most children in Africa are taught in an exogenous language which they do not master. Bamgbose correctly observed:

> *Outside Africa no one questions why the languages of countries with smaller populations in Europe should be used as medium, even up to and including the university level. What seems to be lacking in many African countries is the political will to break away from the colonial policy and practice of limiting mother tongue education to lower primary classes. Where such a will exists much can be done in a short period of time.* (2005: 255)

Having analysed the donor policies on educational quality Mercer (2013: 8–9) concludes: 'To improve learning outcomes, therefore, a key focus must be on support to the development and use of the most appropriate language of instruction and literacy from the *learner's* perspective. Allied to that could be a strategy to support the well qualified teaching of foreign languages in school'. He notes that 'there is a sense of urgency regarding the low quality of education in developing countries with all donors stressing the need for quality improvements and giving extensive attention to the topic'. (2013: 8)

But is it possible to talk about quality in education when the learners do not understand what the teacher is saying and the teacher is not able to use the language of instruction well?

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1   European Commission (2005b); see also European Commission (2005a).

2   Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Japan and the US.

In my paper Language and Inequality (Brock-Utne, 2012a) I mention that in 2000 the National Council for Kiswahili, BAKITA,[3] organised a two-day conference on the language of instruction and quality of education in Tanzania. The minister responsible for education, a professor of science by profession, was invited to give some closing remarks. Martha Qorro (2009) relates that his final comment on the issue of language of instruction was that the Government did not have money to do experiments and 'waste' its few resources on the language of instruction. 'The little money that is available will be spent on improving the quality of education and not on the language of instruction,' he concluded, and declared the conference closed. From the Minister's remarks, one gathers that the language of instruction is seen as separate from the process of delivering quality education. Martha Qorro asks:

For example, did the Minister understand the meaning of language of instruction? How does the language of instruction relate to education, and quality education for that matter? Is it possible to improve the quality of education without addressing the issue of language of instruction? If, for example, the conference had been on electrification of a number of schools, would the Minister have said that there was no money to 'waste' on copper wires and that the little money available would be spent on supplying electricity to the schools! How else is the electrification process to take place if not through copper wires? (2009: 60)

Costs involved in shifting to a familiar language of instruction

On the matter of the language of instruction in Africa one often hears that it would be too costly for African countries to switch from an ex-colonial and foreign language to a familiar African language that the child masters well. One hears arguments that books have to be developed and published, and new terminology created. Sometimes these arguments do not hold water. In Tanzania, for instance, a project based at the Institute for Kiswahili Research, has developed textbooks for the whole of the secondary school system (Mulokozi et al., 2008). Here, there is only a matter of getting them published in large enough quantities and distributed to the schools. With the new desktop printing facilities, books and teaching material in local languages can be produced rather cheaply (Heugh, 2006; Kosonen, 2010).

There are, however, other economic consequences of this choice that are under-researched. These are the costs involved in having children sit year after year in school hardly learning any subject matter but learning that they are less capable, having to repeat classes, dropping out of school, getting low grades because they simply do not master the language of instruction. Parents are spending

money on school fees, school uniforms, transport, and might have needed their children at home to do useful chores. Having the foreign, though often-termed official, language as the language of instruction prevents students from really grasping the subject matter the teacher wants to convey, from developing their own language and from learning the foreign language. They lose on three counts.

The high-level international conference of the European Union

On 23 May 2013, the EU hosted a high-level international conference to discuss the global opportunities and challenges in education and development (European Commission, 2013). The conference agreed that there is much left to do before 2015 to meet the current education goals, both in terms of reaching those children still not accessing education and in improving the quality of education as fundamental to broader development objectives.

Speakers at the conference noted that education should be at the centre of a global development agenda 'because of the contribution it makes to many development areas, including employment, health, environmental sustainability, peace building and food security. Education also contributes to broader democratic governance and citizenship'. (European Commission, 2013: 3) If the international community is serious about access to education and improving its quality so that children are learning when in school, it is important to look at the language children are learning in.

A new global partnership: eradicate poverty

The May 2013 Report of the High Level Panel (HLP), established by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012 to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015 (United Nations, 2013) underscored that rising inequity is a growing worldwide concern. The HLP claims that education planners have to look beyond counting the number of children sitting in classrooms and start to focus on learning. They refer to a recent study[4] of 28 countries in Africa, which found that more than one out of every three students (23 million primary school children) could not read or do basic arithmetic after several years of schooling.

Watkins writes about the impoverished teaching going on in African classrooms, taking Sokoto in Nigeria as an example where:

… the children will be on the receiving end of a monotone recitation geared towards rote learning. Not that there is much learning going on. One recent survey found that 80 per cent of Sokoto's Grade 3 pupils cannot read a single word. They have gone through three years of zero value-added schooling. (2013)

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3   Baraza la Kiswahili Tanzania

4   Africa Learning Barometer: www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/africa-learning-barometer

Watkins does not mention the language in which the pupils cannot read a single word. Bamgbose (2005) has shown that Nigerian pupils who were allowed to study in their native language Yoruba did better in all subjects, including English, than those pupils who were forced to study through English, a foreign language for the majority of Africans in so-called Anglophone Africa.

Watkins (2013) claims that the gulf in education, separating Africa from the rest of the world, is widening; from South Korea to Singapore and in China economic success has been built on the foundations of learning achievement. He does not mention the fact that children in South Korea are learning in Korean and that most Asian children are learning in a familiar Asian language, though not always their mother tongue (Brock-Utne, 2012b, 2013).

In what is claimed to be the first region-wide assessment of the state of learning in Africa the Center for Universal Education at Brookings *This is Africa* Learning Barometer survey estimates that 61 million children of primary school age – one in every two children across Africa – will reach their adolescent years unable to read, write or perform basic numeracy tasks. According to Watkins, the most shocking finding is that over half of these children will have spent at least four years in the education system. Equally alarming, half of the children who enter primary school in Malawi have dropped out by grade 5. He claims that:

Africa needs an education paradigm shift … Teacher recruitment, training and support systems need to be overhauled to deliver effective classroom instruction. The allocation of financial resources and teachers to schools should be geared towards the improvement of standards and equalisation of learning outcomes. And no country in Africa, however poor, can neglect the critical task of building effective national learning assessment systems. (2013)

Of all the reasons Watkins mentions in his article why children in Africa are not learning the most obvious one has escaped him, namely that children do not understand what the teacher is saying. What is the point of a national learning assessment system if what is assessed is rote learning of facts and not genuine understanding? And how is it possible to test anything other than rote learning when that is the way children have to learn when they do not understand what the teacher is saying?

Learning assessments: being tested in a language one does not master

In the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) mathematics test for grade 8, it was reported that out of the 45 countries that participated Ghana finished 44th. Ghanaian students scored 276 compared to the international average of 466. In two

articles in *Ghana News* Fredua-Kwarteng and Ahia (2005a) try to explain these low results. In the first, they discuss the results in mathematics and in the second the results in science. They find the main reason why students do not learn problem-solving and problem-posing skills is the use of a foreign medium of instruction:

Since Ghanaian students took the test in English (the so-called official language of Ghana), those whose first language is non-English are at great disadvantage. We are not surprised that countries that top-performed in the mathematics test – Taiwan, Malaysia, Latvia, Russia – used their own language to teach and learn mathematics.

The two authors, who both are mathematics educators, argue that a Ghanaian student who is proficient in his or her mother tongue would be likely to answer most of the questions correctly if the questions were translated into the native language of the student. The authors further criticise the tests for being rooted in a Western, especially American, environment using concepts that are unfamiliar to Ghanaians such as 'parking lot'.

Mathematics and the sciences are normally difficult subjects for most children to learn. Yet they are important subjects for the development of any country. One would think that policy makers would make a great effort to bring these important subjects to the people in a language they can easily understand. Strangely enough this is not happening. Mazrui and Mazrui (1995) argue that any language is capable of handling modern science and technology. This fact seems not to have been properly understood by many policy makers in Africa.

From 'Education for All' to 'Learning for All'

In 2011 the World Bank released its Education Strategy 2020 called *Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to promote Development.* Surely the move from 'education for all' to 'learning for all' would signify a move from the teacher, the educator to the pupil, the learner. I had expected that this change in phraseology would also lead to an analysis of why so many students, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa [5], drop out of school, repeat grades or sit year after year hardly learning anything. The World Bank Group also states: 'What matters for growth is not the years that students spend in school but what they learn'. (2011: 2)

In the new strategy the World Bank notes that for many students more schooling has not resulted in more knowledge and skills necessary for job creation.

Several studies illustrate the seriousness of the learning challenge. More than 30 per cent of Malian youths aged 15–19 years who completed six years of schooling could not read a simple sentence; the same was true of more than 50 per cent of Kenyan youths. (2011: 6–7)

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5   According to the World Bank, three-quarters of the countries that are the furthest from meeting the MDG on primary completion rates are in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2011: 4).

The first thing I asked myself when I read this sentence was: 'In whose language could the youth not read a simple sentence?' In their own language or a language foreign to them, a language which they hardly hear around them? In an article on illiteracy in Sierra Leone, Banya writes:

Only about 25 per cent of the country's population were (in 1961) literate in English, which is the official language. However, most people are literate in Krio, which is the lingua franca of the country … in absolute numbers there has been a tremendous expansion in the number of illiterates. As the population has increased, the number of literate people has not kept pace; 85 out of every 100 Sierra Leoneans are now illiterate. (1993: 163)

Banya classifies as illiterate those Sierra Leoneans who cannot write and read English even though they may read and write Krio, the lingua franca of their country.

A good education for the majority?

The question is how can a system providing good quality education for the majority of children in Africa be established when teaching is done in a language children do not understand and teachers master badly; a question which surprisingly is not discussed at all by a group of well-known critics (Klees et al., 2012) of recent World Bank education policies, principally *Learning for All* (World Bank, 2011).

As noted by the World Bank (2005): 'Fifty per cent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving 'Education for All'. Dutcher agrees:

The basic problem is that children cannot understand what the teacher is saying! … [I]nstead of making changes that would lead to real advancement, the international community has simply re-pledged itself to the same goals, merely moving the target ahead from the year 2000 to 2015. (2004: 8)

Many authors over the past decade or so have felt that discussing the quality of education in a setting where foreign languages are used as languages of instruction, and become barriers to learning, seems meaningless (Watson, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2012a, 2012c; Brock-Utne and Hopson, 2005; Qorro, 2009; Prah and Brock-Utne, 2009; Ouane and Glanz, 2010, 2011).

Languages in Africa

With the exception of the use of Afrikaans in some universities in South Africa, there is not a single secondary school or university in Sub-Saharan Africa where the language of instruction is an African language. But Africa is not Anglophone, Francophone or Lusophone. Africa is Afrophone. Africans speak African languages. In the so-called Francophone countries, only about five per cent of the population speak French well; in the so-called Anglophone countries about five per cent master English well (Brock-Utne and Skattum, 2009). Even Kiswahili, a language that is spoken by 100 million people in East Africa, is not used as a language of instruction in secondary or higher education.

The debates in Parliament in Tanzania are conducted in Kiswahili. Most of the newspapers in Tanzania are written in that language. Yet the language of instruction in secondary school as well as in higher education is English. This has at least three grave consequences:

1. New intellectual terms in the language people normally speak are not created and the academic vocabulary is not developed.

2. The language of instruction becomes a barrier to accessing knowledge.

3. Mastering of the exogenous language stratifies society and becomes a social marker, creating an elite versus a majority who cannot access that language as easily (Brock-Utne, 2012a).

The myth of the many languages in Africa

Most Africans speak several African languages, among them usually a regional one that could well be used as a language of instruction in higher education. Africans are multilingual in African languages (Prah and Brock-Utne, 2009). A Tanzanian school inspector tells how he grew up with three different languages (Kimizi, 2009). He would speak one of them with his father's clan, another and very different one with his mother's clan – they all lived in the same compound – and Kiswahili with his friends. He could not say which one was his mother tongue or first language (L1). Adama Ouane (2009), from Mali, the former Director of the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, also tells that he grew up with three different African languages simultaneously and, like Kimizi, cannot tell which one is his mother tongue or L1. Africans are now increasingly moving within and between countries and are, as a result, becoming more and more multilingual in African languages. Prah (2009a) found that in Nima, Ghana, 69 per cent of those interviewed spoke at least four languages, while 41 per cent spoke five languages or more.

One of the principal arguments used when it comes to using African languages as languages of schooling is that there has ostensibly been an indeterminate number of languages in Africa and no clear idea as to the precise connections between these languages. There has been no clarity with regards to which speech forms are single autonomous languages and which of them are effectively dialectal variants of major languages. The identification of language communities in Africa, mainly by European or American missionaries and continued by the International Society of Linguistics (SIL, formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics), has been approached in a way which favours the recognition of practically all dialects and phonological variations as separate languages.

However, since 1997, the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), based in Cape Town, has laid the foundation for the development of African languages based on unified orthographies for cognate and proximate languages. Its work can largely be divided into three phases. Firstly, CASAS brings together African linguists to harmonise written forms of African languages that, because of the heavy influence of Western missionaries, have been written differently. CASAS' research shows that 90 per cent of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa could be grouped into 23 language clusters; in fact, 12 to 15 such language clusters would suffice for 75–85 per cent of the population (Prah, 2005, 2009b; Brock-Utne and Mercer, 2013; Brock-Utne and Mercer, 2014). Next, after the scientific work of harmonisation, is the piloting phase when the new orthographies are tried out in adult education, community work and schools. Here CASAS depends on active co-operation with ministries of education, teachers and curriculum development centres – a slow process with leaps forward, standstills and even setbacks. Lastly there is an adoption phase when governments adopt the new orthography, use it in school books, in community service, in adult education and/or in their own day-to-day activities. This is an even slower process, is even less predictable and more political – it depends on advocacy and on finding the right political channels at the right time.

Languages develop through use

Working as a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam (1987–92) I learnt to speak Kiswahili since this was the language all my colleagues would use in tea breaks, at lunch, even in small breaks in the Senate meetings. I picked up vocabulary daily the first two years. I soon noticed that when my colleagues and I started discussing academic issues, they would use more and more English words in their otherwise Kiswahili sentences. Eager to expand my vocabulary I would ask: 'What is that in Kiswahili?' Often they would answer: 'We do not have a word for it.' When a language is not used at the highest level of teaching, new words, concepts or terms are not created in that language.

At the University of Dar es Salaam only the Department of Kiswahili and the Institute for Kiswahili Research use Kiswahili as the language of instruction and the working language. At one time these institutions used English as the language of instruction. When some people suggested that they should switch to Kiswahili, others protested and said: 'That is not possible. We do not have words for 'guttural sounds', not even for 'phonemes'. How can we discuss phonetics when we do not have the terms?' But the political decision was made to switch to the familiar language, the language everyone speaks and soon all the necessary terms were developed. So now one can without difficulty conduct a conference on linguistics in Kiswahili.

While I was teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam some of my students said they wanted to come with me and continue their studies in Norway. I told them that if they wanted to do so, they would have to learn Norwegian. My students were surprised. They thought most universities in Europe would have English as the language of instruction. I told them that if they wanted to study in Greece, they had to learn Greek, in Germany German, in Italy Italian, and so on. At the time – in 1992 – we did not have a single course taught in English in my department. There were hardly any courses taught in English at the University of Oslo.

Over the last 20 years, we have seen a steady growth in the number of master's courses taught in English in the Nordic countries. Academic publishing is going on more and more in English and less in the Nordic languages to an extent where one can claim that the Nordic languages are threatened as academic languages (Brock-Utne, 2001). All languages deteriorate when not used. For an academic language to keep growing it has to be used as a language for publishing at the highest academic level.

Where is Africa heading when it comes to the language issue?

At the beginning of this paper I referred to Bamgbose (2005) who claimed that what seems to be lacking in many African countries is the political will to break away from the colonial policy and practice of limiting mother tongue education to lower primary classes. Is this will increasing? There are setbacks like the recent revision of the language of instruction policy in Zanzibar but there are also some promising signs. Let us, by way of conclusion, concentrate on those.

In a panel organised by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)[6] at the CIES conference in Montreal in May 2011 the panelists talked about ADEA's holistic view of education where the use of native languages as languages of instruction emerged as the top priority. A review undertaken by a research team jointly put together by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and ADEA had found that the interconnectedness

between language, communication and effective teaching and learning was generally misunderstood outside expert circles (Ouane and Glanz, 2011). A policy brief on why and how Africa should invest in teaching through African languages was worked out on the basis of this review (Ouane and Glanz, 2010). In January 2010 ministers of education from 18 different African countries adopted policy guidelines on the integration of African languages into education systems, which were informed by evidence from this research. Still the progress is slow, though there is some progress in the so-called 'Francophone' countries.

A special type of Arabic named Juba Arabic seems to be spreading rapidly in South Sudan. Juba Arabic is spoken on the radio and by civil servants in government ministries. It is the language of the marketplace. Most of all it is the language of the youth, filling the school playground, full of humour and 'street cred'. Calderbank (2013: 223), after gathering opinions about the future use of Juba Arabic in South Sudan, quotes one of his interviewees as saying: 'It is a human right to be educated in one's mother tongue and therefore young South Sudanese must be taught to read and write in Juba Arabic. They can still learn English as a foreign language.' The interviewee mentioned that in countries like Iceland or Finland citizens are educated in their mother tongue and many speak excellent English as well. Another interviewee warned against imposing English against the will of the people: 'One should be wary of selecting English as the medium of instruction. It has proven to be a disaster in other African countries. People will never be literate if they learn in a language other than their mother tongue.' There were, however, other voices saying South Sudan should use English 'in order to talk to the world'.

Information and communication technology (ICT) seems to succeed where language policies have failed. Through samples of text messaging (SMS) and chat among students at the University of Dakar, Senegal, combined with interviews with informants, Lexander (2009) shows that written Wolof is gaining ground. Students use it in writing, and even communicate with relatives considered 'illiterate', who are spurred on to learn to read and write by modern media. Through text messaging on mobile phones they can get the messages in their own language, the language they normally speak. Halvorsen (2010) found that the majority of staff and students at the University of Dar es Salaam read and write Kiswahili when communicating through new technology, especially for writing text messages on mobile phones, chatting or emailing on the internet.

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6   ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) is directed by a Steering Committee composed of 21 aid agency representatives and ten African Ministers of Education.

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Opportunity, equity and identity beyond 2015

10th **INTERNATIONAL**
Language and Development
CONFERENCE

The British Council hosted the tenth International Language and Development Conference in Cape Town in October 2013. The conference coincided with reviews by development professionals and policy makers worldwide of progress towards the eight 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was an opportunity to focus on a range of language-related issues common – but not unique to – developing countries across the African continent. This collection is drawn from papers and presentations across the four main strands of discussion: language policy; language, literacy and education; language in socio-economic development; language, culture, identity and inclusion. The writers look at African languages, varieties of English and other languages from policy level to practical application in the classroom, and in the home and wider community.

Hamish McIlwraith, editor of this publication, is founder of McIlwraith Education, an international education consultancy based in Edinburgh. He has worked as a teacher, lecturer, trainer and consultant in China, Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Europe.

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